

THE FIDDLE TRADITION OF THE SHETLAND ISLES

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## ABSTRACT

This is an introductory ethnographic account of one of the liveliest musical sub-cultures in the British Isles. In Volume One the first chapter sketches in the general ethnography of the islands and surveys the historical sources that inform one on music-making and on the role of the fiddle and its repertory up to the beginning of World War Two.

Chapter Two brings the history of the tradition up to date with a set of biographical sketches compiled from field interviews with some fourteen fiddlers selected from a variety of island communities. Such aspects as how they learned to play, how the repertory is transmitted, performing practice and the social context of their music-making are illuminated through the words of the musicians themselves.

The musical repertory is then discussed. A typology of dance tunes is derived from terms used by the musicians themselves. The style of some of the earliest pieces, mostly now obsolete, suggests links with Scandinavian musical traditions, while the remainder of the repertory, which is principally dance music, suggests increasingly strong Scottish influences on Shetland culture.

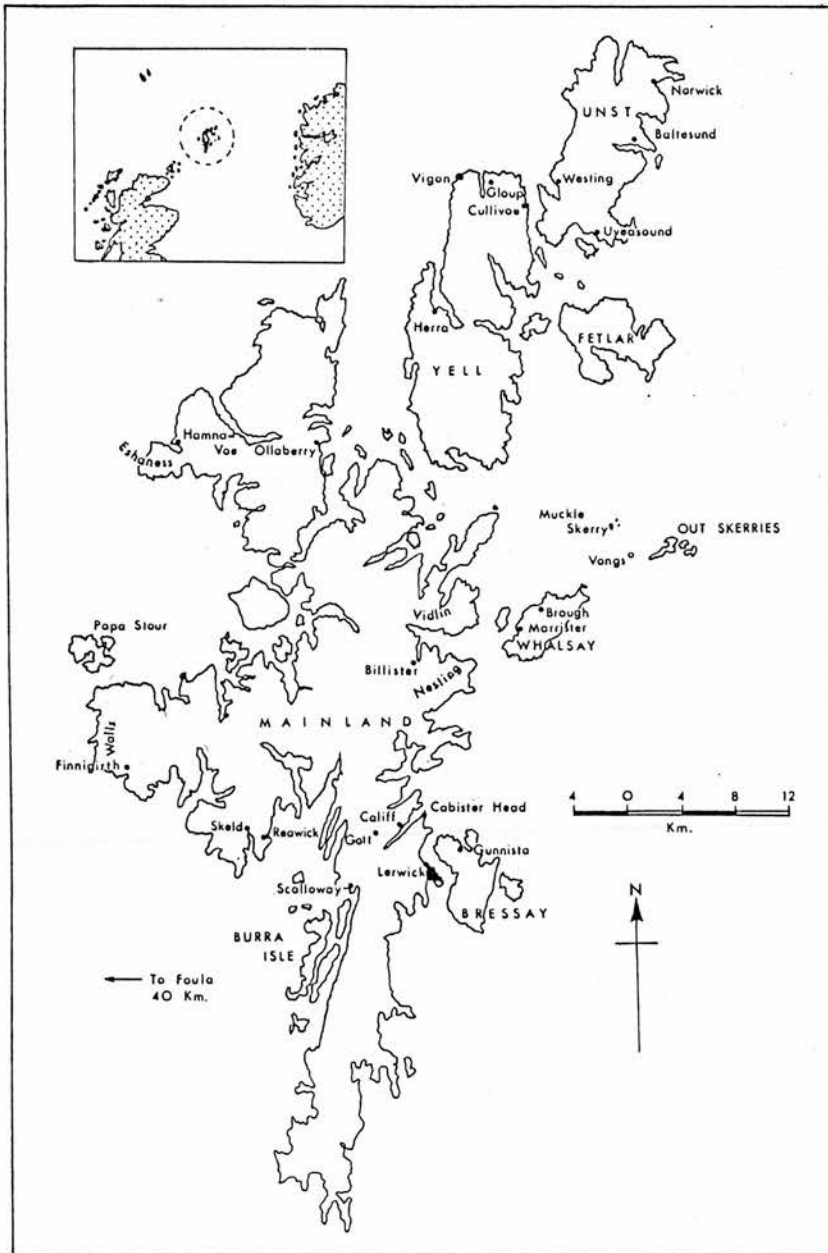
Musical style is discussed in Chapter Four and the influence of social context is examined, particularly the relationship between dancing and its music. Two 'folk' terms are singled out for special attention - namely 'lift' and 'lilt' - which are considered to be of paramount importance in good fiddling. Bio-mechanical factors are also discussed insofar as they affect musical range, tonality and modality. A number of 'fiddle keys' are identified and the unresolved question of the use of 'neutral' intervals is also briefly examined. The performing style of several fiddlers is also analysed so that the distinctive features that mark out one musical community from another can be identified. Such differences are considered to be a function of the relative past isolation and the social self-sufficiency of the Shetland communities.

A final chapter discusses change in recent years and relates the changing social role of fiddlers to changes in musical aesthetics and performing style. Changes in the mode of transmission are also scrutinized, in particular the increasing use of recordings and broadcasting media and the introduction of formal teaching of 'traditional' fiddling into Shetland schools. The author concludes that this, together with the diversification of musical culture in Shetland are likely to have a profound effect on the tradition.

Volume Two contains some 70 musical transcriptions used for illustrating discussions in Volume One, as well as lists of recordings of tunes and texts lodged for further study in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies. A cassette containing 35 of these recorded examples is bound into the back cover of this volume.

THIS THESIS IS OF MY OWN COMPOSING AND IS BASED  
ON MY OWN RESEARCH

# MAP OF THE SHETLAND ISLES



# INDEX OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1.	The Rev. J. Watson	12
2.	Bride and groom lead the dancing of a Shetland reel	25
3.	Da Blin Fiddler, George Stark with his accompanist	43
4.	Jock Youngclaus with a fiddle of his own making	47
5. ↗	Tom Anderson and 'The Young Shetland Players'	47
6. ↘	Tom Anderson with the Shetland Folk Society Band	49
7.	Tom Anderson recording 'Old Willie Hunter'	49
8.	'Having a tune' with Henry Thomson	56
9.	Andrew Poleson	56
10.	'The Cook's House', Whalsay	58
11.	Alan Tulloch	58
12.	John Robertson of Fetlar	63
13.	An 'ad hoc' dance band at Uyeasound, Unst	63
14.	Gilbert Gray	71
15.	Unst Fiddle Society	71
16.	Bobbie Jamieson and Willie B. Henderson	77
17.	Cullivoe Traditional Fiddle Band	77
18.	A double wedding at Skeld	113
19.	John Irvine	113
20.	Cullivoe Hall	120
21.	Jean Pole with Betty Henderson	120
22.	Alec Leask, fiddle maker	154
23.	Trevor Hunter and the Forty Fiddlers	154



## PREFACE

One of my first steps on my appointment to a research position at the School of Scottish Studies was to survey the contents of the School's tape archives in order to identify those areas of Scotland which had been least fully researched by earlier colleagues. Three areas came to notice: the Borders, the central urban belt and the Shetland Isles. In contrast with the Gaelic speaking areas of the western isles, the northern isles had received little attention. The School's own fieldworkers had paid just two visits to the islands around 1954 to carry out some general sampling of the oral tradition there, but the Shetland Folk Society, notably in the person of Tom Anderson, had been carrying out some research in its own territory and Dr. Tom Anderson had already supplied the School with copies of his early recordings. These recordings alone were enough to stimulate my interest in the instrumental tradition of the Shetlands.

I had already become aware of the reputation of the Shetlanders for their lively musical culture in which the playing of the violin (or fiddle as it is mostly called in Shetland, the terms are used synonymously throughout this thesis) was a most important part. It seemed too that the means of transmission was primarily aural/oral and, having recently returned from a four-year sojourn in East Africa where vital and thriving musical traditions also survived entirely without the aid of musical literacy, I was interested to examine how this might work in the Shetland Isles, and furthermore to consider the possible value that a study of such a tradition might have for music education in this country.

This dissertation then is an attempt at an ethnographic account of the fiddle tradition of the Shetland Isles. The first fieldwork visit was made in May 1970 and others followed during the next 12 years with an average of two field trips of approximately a fortnight each year to the islands. Ideally the fieldwork should have been compressed into two or three visits culminating in a long stay in the islands, but the demands of other work and other commitments made this impossible. Early visits were made with the purpose of sampling the repertory of a variety of fiddlers on tape and on several occasions I added 8mm and 16mm cine film to the photographic record I had also been making. Later visits tended to focus on selected musicians as I further explored their repertoires and the contextual background to their music-making. The fact that fieldwork has continued right up to the present (March 1982) has meant that this study is also one of musical change in Shetland, the essential features of which will be discussed in later chapters.

Not all islands in the Shetland archipelago were visited, nor all parts of the mainland, so to some degree this survey is incomplete in geographical extent. For instance the island of Fair Isle was omitted - for reasons of weather on those two occasions when I had been able to include it in my schedule, though I later visited a member of the Stout family who came from that island and was satisfied from the answers given to my questions that I would find nothing strikingly different there from the situation existing elsewhere. Foula (some 40 miles to the west of Mainland Shetland was also not visited, (the population in 1979 was only 36) but I was able to sample the style and repertory of the island from Andrew Gear, a native of Foula now teaching at Mid Yell school and living at Gutter in north Yell. He also kindly provided me with recordings of his father's

fiddling. Papa Stour, a small island off the coast of Walls (west Mainland) was also not visited (population 38, 1976). This was the former home of the famous Papa Stour sword dance, a dance-drama in which the 'Seven champions of Christendom' are introduced in turn to speak their part and then perform a danced routine similar to sword dances in England. But the main source of folkloric information on life in Papa Stour is the gifted musician and story teller George P.S. Peterson who was brought up in Papa Stour, who learned and now teaches the Papa Stour sword dance as well as knowing the fiddle music repertory of the island. He moved from the island to complete his education and now teaches at Brae school nearby on the Mainland. I was able to visit him on several occasions to fill in details of the fiddle music tradition as it existed in earlier times on Papa Stour, for the island is now very depopulated and the native population is diluted considerably with incomers to the island.

Any work of music ethnography should endeavour to answer at least the following questions: Who are the music makers and their audiences? When is music performed and why? What music is performed? How is it composed and performed? How are the performing skills learned and what aesthetic criteria are used by performers and listeners? These may seem obvious questions and simple to ask, but it has not proved so simple to answer them. Not all these questions are answered in separate discrete sections; some are - for example the discussion of the repertory - but the answers to others only emerge in *passi* in the accounts given to me by musicians and others during my interviews with them.

As will be seen, little has been written about the fiddle tradition of the Shetland Isles and an early bibliographical search

1. In each case, unless they are quotations from other publications, the transcription is of the particular performance cited, though not always is it an exact transcription of what was played from the beginning since it sometimes made sense to prefer what was sounded in later repeats.

yielded little more than passing comments, apart from some small collections of fiddle tunes and notes in the Shetland Folk Society's books and a pair of essays by the pioneer collector Patrick Shuldham-Shaw who visited the Shetland Isles during the period 1947-52 (see Shuldham-Shaw, 1947, 1962). Other writings are discussed in Chapter One. My efforts therefore were concentrated on collection of information in the field and in any case it was the living tradition that I wished to study. This has yielded some 194 tapes of recorded information, including approximately 60 hours of musical performance. All recordings have been indexed and deposited in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, where they are available for further study. Photographs and films have also been placed in the School's archives.

#### Note on music transcriptions and on Shetland orthography.

Music transcriptions are for the most part included in the second volume. The type of transcription varies according to the immediate purpose of the example.<sup>1</sup> I have tried to use standard western musical notation, but introduced modifications where necessary. For instance an upward pointing arrow (↑) indicates that the note shown really sounds about a quarter-tone sharp, a downward arrow indicates the converse. Where this happens consistently throughout a piece, these sharper or flatter notes are shown in the "key signature" by the signs ♯ and ♭. Often I make no attempt to show the slight lengthening and shortening of notes which are played at speed in the performance of reels and which are usually written as semiquavers. However where necessary I add an extra bar (f) through the tail of a note to show that it is shorter than the value given and that the extra time is taken up by its neighbour. This is convenient way of suggesting the equivalent of 'notes inegales' where the time proportion within pairs of semiquavers

is not equally divided nor is it so unequal that 'dotting and tailing' would be an appropriate way of showing the difference, for the proportion may often be 5:3,4:3,5:2 etc within the time span of a quaver. Where I make a detailed discussion of such micro-rhythmic organisation I have resorted to machine transcriptions made with the aid of the technical staff of the linguistics department of this university. 'Key signatures' should be regarded as little more than an indication of which notes are to be read as flat or sharp and not as a pointer to which is the tonic note of a melody.

I have used no particular convention in transcribing and quoting from numerous conversations held with Shetlanders during field work. The dialect varies considerably from one district to the next and often I found that in any case some of my informants attempted to abandon their broader native dialect when they thought I might not understand their normal speech. I have, however, attempted to preserve some of the flavour of their dialect while anglicising some words for reasons of comprehension.

#### Sound recordings and the cassette example tape

In the archives of the School of Scottish Studies all original field recordings are archived with a numbering system that begins with the prefix SA followed by the year of the recording and then its unique tape number. Such reference numbers are used throughout this dissertation and are also used to identify the source of the transcriptions given in volume 2. An example tape selected from the transcribed items <sup>(those marked with \*)</sup> has been prepared on cassette and this is bound into the back of the same volume. They are for the most part copies of original field recordings made by the author since 1970 - such recordings having been made on a Nagra III recorder (whole-track - mono, at 19cm.p.s.) using Sennheiser microphones. A few examples date

from before this time - most of them being copies recordings made by Dr. Tom Anderson during his own researches and presented to the School. He was a pioneer in the collection of traditional music in Shetland and this is an appropriate place to record our thanks for his unselfish and inspiring work over the years and for the generous help and hospitality which he gave to the School's fieldworkers whenever they visited Shetland.

#### Acknowledgements.

Any work of ethnography such as this depends from outset to completion on the generous cooperation and hospitality of the 'folk' themselves. They are too numerous to list here though the names of many of them appear during the chapters of this work. But to all I am grateful for the readiness with which they shared their knowledge with me and for their kindly hospitality. One of the greatest joys of this kind of research lies in the friendships one makes and in the greater awareness of oneself which one gains from such contacts.

To my supervisor Michael Tilmouth I should also like to express my thanks - for his sustained interest and skilfull advice over the many years that this part-time study has extended. Lastly my thanks go to my wife Diana, for her patient support and encouragement and for her expert typing of early drafts.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ETHNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

"Shetlanders are much addicted to fiddling"

The Shetland islands, the most northerly region of the British Isles, number well over a hundred isles and islets lying mostly north of the latitude 60° north and totalling approximately 551 square miles. Situated equidistantly between Bergen, Aberdeen and the Faroes, they are separated from the British mainland by some 105 miles of strongly tidal and often stormy seas. Before 1469 the islands formed part of a Scandinavian empire but were pawned to Scotland in 1469 as part of a marriage arrangement involving Princess Margaret of Norway. Strong commercial and political links were maintained with Norway for at least another 200 years, during which time a dialect of Anglo-Scots slowly replaced the older Norse tongue which, however, Low found still in use in more remote parts of Shetland during his visit in 1774. Thus if we take both geography and history into consideration it is not surprising if today many Shetlanders consider themselves more Scandinavian than British - or for that matter Scottish - a point of no mean political significance at times when Scotland attempts to gain greater autonomy. Today the more obvious Scandinavian traits are to be observed in place names, in many features of dialect and, so far as this dissertation is concerned, in the structure and style of certain older fiddle tunes which resemble music for the Hardanger fiddle.



The islands are low-lying and virtually treeless - eroded by glaciation in earlier times and by the attacks of winds, sea and rain since then. Much of the land is of generally poor agricultural quality, some of it blanketed in deep deposits of peat, and even in the more fertile areas the short growing season, coupled with the damaging effects of salt spray carried inland by frequent gales, tends to make agriculture a precarious and often profitless occupation. On the other hand, erosion has produced numerous deep voes (long, narrow inlets) and many small islets and bays which combine to provide an abundance of small, sheltered harbours so necessary to Shetland's major industry - fishing. Though the waters around Shetland have been a plentiful source of fish, the average Shetlander - though often a brave seaman - has only recently been in a position to acquire wealth from his efforts, mainly owing to Shetland's isolation from markets and its dependence on entrepreneurs.

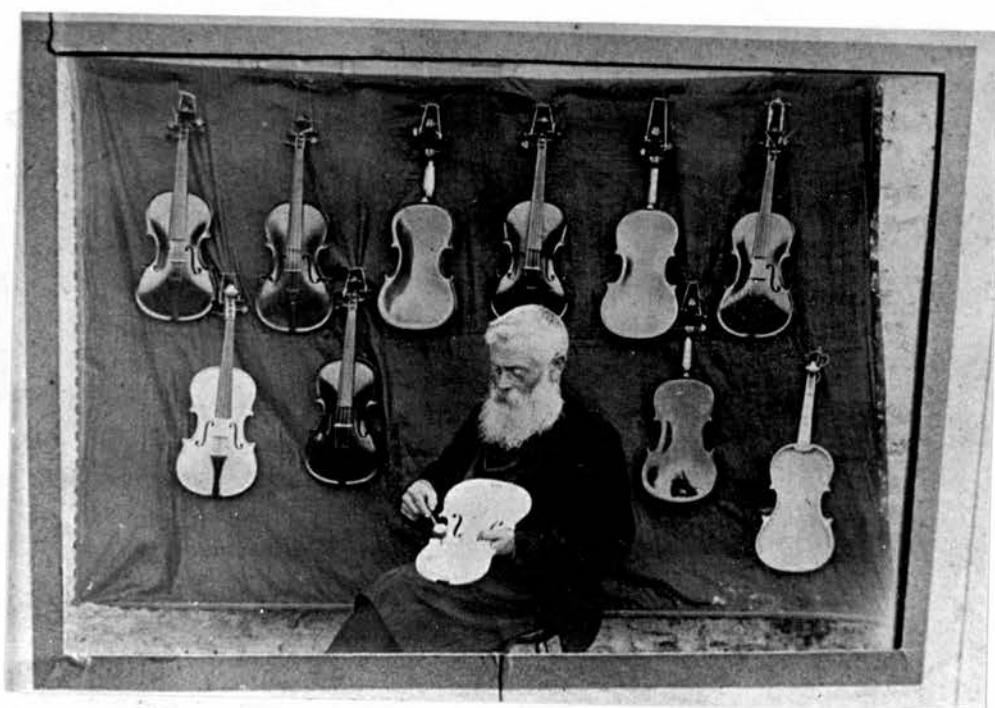
When the violin was first introduced to Shetland - which may have been around the year 1700 - Shetland economy was undergoing a change. Before that time Shetlanders divided their time between farming and inshore fishing, which latter was practised mainly on a small scale during the period May to August. Their surplus fish was sold to Hanseatic traders who came each year to re-open their stone-built trading booths and to supervise the salting and wind-drying of the fish. It is quite possible that these were the men initially responsible for the introduction of violins. By 1712, however, a tax on salt brought this trading to an effective end, allowing Scottish merchants, mostly the local lairds, to fill the vacuum. The Shetland crofter found himself now having to fish for the landowner to pay rents for his land and, at the same time, having to go farther offshore to find the fish, which had become scarce inshore.



This is the period of what is known as the Haf fishery. During the period 20th May to 12th August each year the able-bodied males formed themselves into fishing teams of six, to man the large open sixereens (six-oared vessels) in which they set off whenever weather permitted for fishing grounds (hafs) up to 40 miles from land.

They lived during this time in huts at shore stations conveniently chosen for reaching the fishing grounds in the shortest possible time and often at some distance from their own crofts, so that their womenfolk were expected to take over management of the crofts during this period. C. A. Goodlad in his detailed survey of the Shetland fishing industry estimates that, on average, about 18 visits were made to the Haf during each season and we may surmise that the men must have spent many days and nights ashore in semi-idleness waiting for better weather. This situation has some parallels with the bothy system of north-east Scotland, where young men were housed communally in farm bothies for their six-month period of fee'd labour. Henderson has called the bothy system a 'sort of folksong incubator' (ref. Disc notes TNGM 109, London, 1971) and it is possible that in the same kind of way the fishing huts at the shore stations also served as forcing houses for an instrumental music tradition in Shetland, not forgetting a lively song tradition with sea ballads and shanties featuring prominently in it.

What little we know of the social life of Shetlanders during the 18th and early 19th centuries comes from travellers' accounts and from reports submitted as part of the Statistical Account of Scotland, and there is a good deal of variety in these accounts dependent on the different experiences of the writers. Most, however, comment on the extremely hospitable nature of the Shetland peasant-fishermen of the



The Rev. J. Watson, Burravoe  
c. 1890

time, a trait which clearly has persisted to the present, judging by the fieldwork experiences of this writer.

The Statistical Account for the parish of Delting, compiled during 1791-99, remarks 'the people are not disposed to industry: for which they cannot however be much blamed'. In contrast, George Low, who toured Shetland in 1774, obtained a different account of social life from a minister in Unst:-

Diversions obtain only in the winter and consist in dancing on some stated days about and after Christmas, when they meet in considerable numbers, men and women, and divert themselves in playing cards, etc. until the night is well spent. (Low, p.163)

He makes no mention of musical instruments, but mentions, however that in the island of Foula (one of the most isolated and hence probably conservative of the whole archipelago) at least three kinds of poetry were still recited or sung in the old Norn language: the Ballad or Romance, a long excerpt of one being quoted; the 'Vysie or Vyse, now commonly sung to dancers'; and the 'simple song' (Low, p.107). But, judging by the attitudes of some 19th century churchmen to fiddle music and to dancing throughout Scotland, it is possible that few ministers would choose to mention the fiddle or even be likely to see one, except at weddings. (The Rev. J. Watson of S. Yell was a notable late 19th-century exception. His hobby was making violins.)<sup>1</sup>

Yet in the Statistical Account for the same island 20 years later one finds:

Music and dancing are favourite amusements especially in Winter. Many of the common people play with skill upon the violin. Gin is the spiritous liquor most generally in use; and although there are no alehouses, is often drunk by the lower classes in too great quantities."

(Reid Tait, 1925, p.44)

<sup>1</sup> I have met with several of his instruments - they are of excellent craftsmanship but are a trifle too thin and so lose their voice after a short period of playing.

From the several early 19th-century accounts a general picture emerges of a hard working fishing and crofting peasantry eking out a bare subsistence from the dual labour of fishing and managing a small croft - for it suited the lairds to divide up crofts into almost useless small parcels so that the menfolk were forced to turn increasingly to fishing (for him) in order to survive. The period of the v̇ar (spring) was a time of great activity, ploughing, sowing and tending crops and cutting winter fuel out on the peat moor. It was followed by the long days of a short summer spent fishing at the 'far Haf' using the boats and tackle belonging to the laird; there was then a rush to gather in the small harvest before the dark wild days of winter set in. These seasonal changes were usually marked with foys (feasts or celebrations) of one kind or another (see Saxby, 1915) and for a month following the winter solstice - a period known as the 'helli-days of Yule' - the gloom of winter would be kept at bay with as much feasting and jollification, including dancing, as could be afforded.

Sir Arthur Edmondstone's View of the Ancient and Present State of the Zetland Isles, 1809, contains one of the most detailed and sympathetic accounts of the habits and attitudes of Shetlanders in the early 19th century. It is worth quoting part of it at length, particularly since so many later writers seem to have relied on it as a source for their own writings. After commenting on the general 'social and hospitable nature of the Shetlanders and of the fondness of the men for spirits and snuff, and the women for drinking tea', he continues:-

"Music is very generally cultivated, as an amusement, by the Zetlanders of all ranks, and some of them have at different times attained no inconsiderable degree of excellence in several of its departments. Many of the sexes have voices capable of great modulation, but they are seldom improved; and among the peasantry almost one in ten can play on the violin.

There are still a few native airs to be met with in some parts of the country, which may be considered as peculiar, and very much resemble the wild and plaintive strain of the Norwegian music. Before violins were introduced, the musicians performed on an instrument called a gue, which appears to have had some similarity to the violin, but had only two strings of horse hair, and was played upon in the same manner as a violoncello.

"Although the Scottish [sic] be the prevailing music of the country the native musicians insensibly impart to it a character of their own, the smoothness and simplicity of which they seem to have derived from their Scandinavian ancestors, and which no intercourse with other countries has yet been able altogether to efface. Of those, however, who have had opportunities of cultivating, scientifically, the stile of the Scottish reel, a few has displayed a taste and originality in composition not inferior to the most celebrated musicians of Scotland.

"Dancing is a favourite amusement with the youth of both sexes, but they display neither the grace nor the agility of the Highlanders. The frequency of meeting for this purpose has been much abridged, since the late severe restrictions on the brewing of ale, and the abolition of smuggling. The former has been felt as a serious inconvenience, but the latter has had a beneficial effect on their moral character."

(1809, p.59-61)

In this passage one finds the first mention of what appears to have been the indigenous forerunner of the violin - the gue. Virtually nothing is known about this instrument. Otto Anderson considered the gue to have been a type of bowed lyre and a counterpart of the Welsh crwth or the early English crowd, to mention just two of the now obsolete north-European lyres (Anderson, 1956). He appeared to have discounted Edmondstone's footnote (p.60) which compared the gue to the two-stringed Icelandic fidla - a rectangular bowed box-zither. Unfortunately no other accounts mention the gue other than those which are clearly based on Edmondstone's report (e.g. by E.Y. Arima and M. Einarsson (1976) into Hibbert and Tudor); but quite recent independent investigation<sup>^</sup> the distribution of the Eskimo violin (known as the tautiruut) appear to support Edmondstone. The tautiruut is also a bowed box-zither similar to the fidla, but its limited distribution in areas around the old established posts of the Hudson's Bay Trading Company suggest it was

introduced not by Icelanders, but by seamen from Orkney and Shetland serving in the Company's ships.

In Shetland it appears likely therefore that the violin was rapidly absorbed into a pre-existing string-playing tradition. Few violins need to have been made locally for there were direct trading links not only with the Hanseatic traders, but also with the crews and traders on board the Dutch herring fleets which visited Shetland waters each season throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Furthermore, during years of poor fishing, there was a good deal of temporary migration - Shetland men choosing to enlist for a period in the British Navy, or more often, in the mercantile marine until news came to them that the fishing had improved. Returning seamen must have brought a great many violins back with them as homecoming presents - a practice which persists down to the present day.

Early 19th century accounts suggest that the violin (or fiddle, as it will henceforth be called) played an essential role in a number of rituals. Edmondstone is the first to mention the tradition of playing a special tune on the morning of Yule day:-

Long before daylight, the fiddlers present themselves at the doors of the houses, playing a tune called the Day-Dawn, the interesting association of which thrills every soul with delight.....

This tune has long been consecrated to Yule day, and is never played on any other occasion."

(1809, p.66-67)

Hibbert, no doubt rewriting and enlarging on Edmondstone, printed a setting of the tune made by a Miss Kemp of Edinburgh and styled it 'an ancient Norwegian tune' (p.253). This tune is still in circulation today, more or less in the form first noted down, it having been revived by members of the Shetland Folk Society fiddle band (e.g. see T. Anderson and others: The Silver Bow, disc 12T281, 1976).

Another use for the fiddle was in the performance of Sword dances which, according to J. Catton, were 'a relick of the ancient Norwegian customs' and 'frequently performed at country weddings' (1838, p.111). But the only Sword dance of which we know anything is that from the small island of Papa Stour. Hibbert was the first to describe the dance in detail and to quote in full the texts spoken by the characters, St. George and his Seven Champions of Christendom (1822, p.252). According to Hibbert, Papa Stour was the only island in the country where the Sword dance was preserved, but it is possible that by Catton's time of writing (1838) a team of dancers from Papa Stour was happy to be engaged to travel outside their own island to perform at weddings. This is partly true today, for a team of boys living in Brae and trained by a local schoolmaster, George P. S. Peterson (himself a native of Papa Stour), will often perform the sword dance on request in other areas. But in the 1830s when there were few, if any, roads to ease overland travel in Shetland, this must have been unlikely, for Papa Stour lies in a notoriously exposed position off the north-west corner of the Walls district and sea travel from there must have been fraught with uncertainty and sometimes danger.

The third ritual at which the fiddler came to play an increasingly important part was at weddings. No other instruments are ever mentioned in connection with dancing in 19th century Shetland life and the fiddler came to be regarded as something more than a mere provider of music for dancing. His part in the wedding ritual outside the dance itself will be described later in this chapter - for now it is necessary to discuss briefly the kind of dances performed.



George Low's Unst informant described one type of dance current in the 1770s as:-

Peculiar to themselves, in which they do not proceed from one end of the floor to the other in a figure [as in many longways country dances], nor is it after the manner of a Scotch reel; but a dozen or so form themselves into a circle, and taking each other by the hand, perform a sort of circular dance, one of the company all the while singing a Norn Visick. This was formerly their only dance but now it has almost given entire way to the reel."

(Low, p.163).

This earlier type of dance persisted into the 20th century and was known around World War I as the Auld Reel or Muckle Reel: it is documented and described by Joan F. and Tom M. Flett in their study Traditional Dancing in Scotland and a number of unusually structured fiddle tunes associated with it have survived orally to the present day. It is possible that the fiddle gradually took over sole musical responsibility for these older dances as the Norn texts fell into disuse, at some point in the 18th century overlapping so that it provided a strong rhythmical and almost harmonic accompaniment to the dance-song. The surviving pieces for this genre will be described in more detail in chapter three.

The earliest description of the kind of reels that gradually superseded the Auld Reel appears in an article entitled "Shetland Marriages" in Chambers Journal (10th December 1859) from an anonymous writer. Part of it runs as follows:-

"In this art they are wonderful proficient, for they can dance hours without intermission. A row of men occupies one side of the house from end to end, and a row of women stands opposite. The fiddler strikes up some riotous and ranting tune; the dancers begin - they skip, they frisk, they fling, they leap with the utmost agility, assuming every posture and attitude. Some lean forward, and are intent in examining the skipping and frisking of their feet; some lean backward, and have their eyes fixed on the ceiling of the house for half an hour. One man is leaning sideways, and with sidelong glance is graciously admiring the frisking of one of his feet; every



one, in short, has some peculiar and original dance of his own. In these different and peculiar postures they continue, without reeling, for half an hour, thumping and pelting at it, till perspiration streams to the ground and mist ascends in clouds, or, as Burns would have said, 'till ilka body swat and reekit.' During the half hour they thus dance without reeling....."Whenever they intend to reel, one of them takes the lead, and all the rest follow; or perhaps the fiddler gives intimation that it is time for them to do so by making a discordant and hideous sound on the bass-string of his fiddle. They do not reel for half an hour, but run twice or thrice round the house, and then set to the dance again with redoubled fury. Burns must have seen something similar to the Shetland mode of dancing before he described his dance of the witches. I never fully understood or saw the force of that till I witnessed Shetland weddings."

It is difficult to accept certain parts of this description. Later accounts suggest that the dances consisted of a much more formal and regular alternation between travelling (reeling) and dancing on the spot opposite one's partner (setting) and the structures of reel tunes of the period which have survived into this century, presumably without much change, suggest that one half of the tune was used for reeling and the other half for dancing, as is the case today. However, other details in the account, such as the contrasting postures and variety of steps exhibited by the male dancers, and their energy and vigour, are still true among those island communities where the Shetland reel has not yet become obsolete.

Another newspaper account written by a Shetlander around 1875 and entitled Recollections of a Shetland Wedding (By a Bridegroom's Man) describes in much greater detail a wedding said to have been held in Scousburgh district (Mainland Shetland) in 1839 when the writer was still a boy (see Appendix 1). It endorses much of the earlier description and also, as far as the Shetland reel is concerned, present day practice. The two types of setting described in the account are the two most common styles to be found today: the first is a simple back step combined with a hop forward on the other foot and

is today danced particularly among younger dancers; the second where the dancer "gives each leg an alternate shake" is now a speciality of men native to Whalsay Island where it is called the 'Whalsay shuffle'. This writer recorded both styles of dancing on 16mm synchronised sound film.

Judging by available records, few other dances were known and practised among the ordinary Shetlanders in the mid 19th century. The Foula reel has already been mentioned as being known to Hibbert in 1822 and it is still known today, but other dances were not introduced until nearer the end of the 19th century. They were probably brought in by immigrant workers who came north during the summer months each year as the herring fishing industry expanded.

In the homes of lairds it must have been slightly different. Scottish dancing masters, who made handsome livings giving instruction around the countryside of Scotland in both the big houses and country barns, rarely made the arduous sea voyage north from Orkney or the mainland. But lairds and ministers apparently sent their children south for their education. The Rev. John Mill recorded sending his daughter to Edinburgh in 1768 to learn "sewing and working of stockings, writing, arithmetic, dancing, Church music, etc." (Goudie, 1889, p.32). There were occasional dances in the lairds' homes, however. Another account from Chambers Journal, "Yule Time in Shetland by an old Shetlander", which was published appropriately enough on December 24, 1881, describes a yule night dance in the house of an Unst laird during the 1830s, as recalled by the laird's young nephew, the son of his brother, the local doctor. It is the earliest known account that identifies the fiddler and conveys so well the esteem which has been traditionally accorded to good fiddlers in

Shetland that it is worth quoting a lengthy part of it:-

"But the proceedings of the day were not yet over. A number of my uncle's tenants in our neighbourhood, and their wives and sons and daughters, having been invited to a dance in the evening, they began to drop in about six o'clock. When all were assembled, a goodly company of honest fishermen, buxom matrons, stalwart lads and blithe rosy-cheeked lasses, all dressed in their Sunday best, tea and cake were handed round. Fredamen Stickle, a very prince of fiddlers, summoned from over the hill for the occasion, was elevated on a chair on the top of the dresser in the ample kitchen, my uncle's splendid Straduarius fiddle in hand, and dancing began. Fredamen - or Fraedie as he was familiarly called - was a born musician, and handled the bow with admirable ease, grace, and spirit. His grandfather or great-grandfather was a shipwrecked German sailor, who had married and settled in the island. Probably Fraedie's [sic] German ancestry had something to do with his remarkable musical tastes and talents. I have a vivid memory of Fraedie sitting on his elevated perch, his head thrown back, his bright light-blue eyes sparkling, and his handsome, mobile, and expressive countenance beaming with smiles of delighted excitement, while his right hand swept the strings with well-rosined bow, and his right foot beat loudly the splended time like a drumstick. The man's spare but lithe and sinewy body seemed to be transformed into a musical machine; and the music was the most inspiring of its kind I have ever listened to. It was irresistible. It compelled the dullest and the weariest to take the floor nolens volens. Quadrilles, waltzes, polkas, and the like were unknown and unheard-of dances in those remote regions. But reels and strathspeys, country-dances and jigs, followed each other in quick succession until eleven o'clock. Then a substantial supper was served, concluding with some rounds of potent punch. But there never was anything approaching to what may be termed excess. 'Health and goodnight' was drunk, the invited guests dispersed, and we tumbled into bed; and so Yule day ended."

This sounds a more formal occasion than the average croft dance and one wonders too how the local tenants coped with strathspeys and country dances. Jig tunes have survived to the present day - though no record of how they were danced in earlier times has survived, apart from the dance known as the Shaalds of Foula. The few strathspeys that came north are today played and danced in the style of ordinary Shetland reels - their staccato rhythms ('Scotch snap') having vanished completely - or are performed sometimes for the Schottische dance.

## THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

As will have already been noted, fiddle and dance traditions during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were thinly documented. Several of the sources quoted read like nostalgic memories of an earlier age and possibly contain a good deal of exaggeration. As the century goes on there appear an increasing number of these, some of them couched picturesquely in Shetland dialect. But it becomes clear that the Shetland reel, the fiddler, croft dancing and the wedding are coming increasingly to be regarded as symbols of the best aspects of Shetland social life. One frequently comes across remarks such as:-

So keenly does the Shetlander relish the fiddle, that he will dance for hours without tasting anything more exhilarating than water. Yule time without a ball would have been deemed no Yule; indeed there was a ball every weeknight for twelve nights after.

(Reid, 1869, p58)

The blind writer J. Haldane Burgess (himself a self-taught fiddler) used Shetland dialect in many of his writings (c. 1886-1916) which mostly take the form of short stories. It is difficult to evaluate them: though crammed with interesting ethnographic detail they read like a record of an idyllic rural life gone by - if it were not for the fact that in certain communities - particularly in Yell, Unst and Fetlar - such scenes and dialect are commonplace today nearly one hundred years later. As will be seen from the accounts of fiddler-informants visited by this writer in the 1970s such scenes as pictured in the two excerpts that follow were certainly not unknown to them:-

Dan Mary raise ta wirk about gettin' ready da supper, an Tammy took his fiddle oot a' da kyist, ta gie wis twar-three springs till da taties wis boild. Da doctir axed him fur da 'Floors o' Edinburgh' first, an' dan fur da 'Liverpool Hornpipe'. Tammy played dem fine, bit it wis whin he cam ta da 'Sailor ower da Rofftree' 'at he warmed up till it richt. Dat wis his favourit' spring, an' he used ta go fur da back strings laek

wan o'clock. He played twar tree mair, an' dan da supper wis ready, - sillocks an' taties...." (from 'A Nicht in Tammy Scolla's but end' in Shetland Sketches, 1886, p.77)

"Dan da fluir wis cleared, in cam' Jermy Tarl wi' his posh, an' climmed up ipun a aald kyist o' Hendry's 'at wis standin' i' da coarner. He took aff his jacket and hung ipo da back o' da shair 'at we wir pitten up ipo da kyist fur him ta sit on. Dan he set him doon, screwed his pins, an' brook into 'Da sailor ower da roff tree' laek hooro! Faith, , he cud wiggle his elbie, no een i' da hael perrishin cud come near him. "Juist gie him a dram o' da best; pit some o' da young eens ipo da fluir for a rael aald Shetlan' reel, an' dan wait you." (from 'Geordie Twatt's Bridal' Shetland Sketches, 1886, p.113)

At such times Haldane Burgess seems to be gently poking fun at the Shetland fiddler, but in his poem 'Rasmie's Smaa Murr' Shetland News, Dec5. 1916) he produces the line

"Da young haert laeps at da plink o da posh"

which sums up very neatly the deep-rooted affection which many Shetlanders had by his time for the fiddle and for dancing. The almost Bacchanalian fervour with which Shetlanders enjoyed the Yule season had to be balanced against the precarious existence most Shetland families endured for most of the year. Hardship was with them always and tragedy often just around the corner. The year 1881 for instance was the year of 'the great gale' when ten sixtereens were lost at sea and 58 men drowned. The focus of fishing activity had by then swung over to cod fishing in even more distant waters around the Faroes and Rockall, with men at sea for longer periods than before. Many others were away in the Merchant Navy, or engaged (usually in Scandinavian vessels) in the Greenland whale fishery. For these men a short period of time spent back home in Shetland was a period to be cherished and enjoyed.

There is another possible reason for this kind of writing. Many of the more highly educated literate Shetlanders either had to find employment away from Shetland (a situation which still applies in

spite of the opportunities offered by North Sea oil developments) or else they lived in the mushrooming port of Lerwick (which between 1850 and 1900 nearly doubled its population to become 16% of the total Shetland population). If in the 1970s the life style of the Lerwegians contrasts considerably with that of their country cousins, the same is likely to have been true for the 1880s, and the writings of Burgess and others may be interpreted as the townsman's self-consciousness mixed with a nostalgia for aspects of rural life.

The most common reason for a Lerwegian to visit a country community - especially if it is one of the more inaccessible islands - is to attend the wedding of a relative and it is not surprising if weddings come to be among the most relished memories of country life. Several writers have attempted to describe Shetland country weddings: they include Hibbert (1822,p.253), Reid (1869,p.60), Haldane Burgess (1886,p.113), Hardy (1913,p.223) and Venables (1956,Ch.3) in addition to the 'Recollections of a Shetland Wedding' mentioned earlier and included in full as Appendix 1.

J.F. and T.M. Flett built up a composite view of the wedding ritual as it was until around the outbreak of World War 1, using the writings cited above and interviews with a large number of informants in various parts of Shetland (1964,p. 65-74). The writer's own fieldwork has for the most part only verified their description. Dancing to the fiddle sealed the official contract made in the bride's home several days before the wedding itself; the groom visited a fiddler to invite him formally to be principal fiddler at the wedding and usually asked him to his own last bachelor party the night before. In the days before the arrival of motor transport the fiddler led the wedding party on the march to and from the church, playing appropriate





Bride and groom lead the dancing of a Shetland reel  
in Cullivoe village hall  
1975.

melodies (the words and tunes of which are still in circulation) and, of course, played for the dancing each night. In places where the bride was ceremonially put to bed, the fiddler was also there to play. The principal fiddler formerly received his fiddler's money at the end of a sequence of bride's reels; later, however, he was paid by the groom personally.

Though it is stressed that this is a composite view built up from the accounts of customs in several different communities, elements of which fell into disuse at various times throughout the first half of this century, it is clear that the fiddler was regarded as a key figure at weddings with his music serving as a ritual marker at the key points during the course of the complete event. The actual playing for dancing was itself 'a hard night's work'.

In many of the accounts the visits of guisers are mentioned. They are uninvited visitors who turn up at some stage of the festivities, usually during the dance, in disguise and under the control of a leader known variously as the skaekler or skudler (scuddler), sometimes with their own fiddler in the party. Such visiting known as guising also took place during the New Year revels (Cowie, 1879, p.127). In Lerwick the custom has become institutionalised with the festival known as Up Helly Aa when the majority of the menfolk of the town go out as squads of guisers to visit each and every one of the dance halls after the ritual burning of the Viking galley.

As this brief survey of available records moves into the 20th century, we reach a time of developing interest in folklore among the educated Shetlanders. The Viking Society for Northern Research was



formed in 1892 and in its journal the Old Lore Miscellany, which first appeared in 1907, one finds a variety of information, mostly relating to earlier times, including some notations of Shetland and Orkney fiddle tunes and songs. These musical excerpts will be discussed in a later chapter on the fiddlers' repertory.

Other useful articles are Jessie Saxby's Foys and Fanteens [Feasts and Fasts], (O.L.M., viii, 1915, p.22) where she surveys the various feasts of the Shetland calendar and Arthur W. Johnston's description of The Papa Stour Sword Dance (1912, p.175). Comments in other books and articles merely reinforce the by now accepted notion that "The violin has always been their favourite instrument" (W.P. Livingstone, 1947, p.80) and Laurence Williamson of Mid Yell sums up the whole situation concisely in his folklorist note headed Fiddle Springs:-

"Shetlanders are much addicted to fiddling. Formerly there were large numbers of fiddlers in every parish. Weddings were usually in winter and lasted three days and usually there were several fiddlers to play. The chief amusement was music and dancing and fiddlers followed them to church, striking up tunes as they went along. Rants were balls open to every comer. They were held in winter and very frequent, and on almost every one of the 24 Hely nights of Yule, and old and young wended to the spot for miles and miles around. A whole family would even shut up the house and go miles away where their relations stayed. And in the long winter evenings the fiddler would play to the children around the fire. And each Greenland ship used to carry a fiddler, sometimes a Southerner, sometimes a Shetlander, to play to the men while at work to enliven them. And sometimes the fiddlers from several ships would meet and try their skill. And I think I have heard of a Shetland fiddler competing with the Dutch from a buss or ship. No wonder that tunes are so abundant. Several of them are fairy tunes, and are likely very old; many are of Norse origin and many Scotch; and many of them must have been learned from the sources indicated above. There is even a Yaki, i.e. Eskimo tune. The tunes had usually two turns, some had more. Some had different names in different parishes."

(L.G.Johnson, 1971, p.125)

In fact, by the outbreak of the first World War Shetland was ceasing to be a single-instrument society (pianos, guitars and melodeons had

arrived on the scene) and, though the Shetlanders' zest for dancing continued unabated apart from war-time interruptions, a new repertory of dances was being introduced and the Shetland reel was losing its popularity, especially among the young men returning from the war.

One important reason was the tremendous seasonal migration of gutters, packers and coopers who came north every August to cope with the enormous harvest of herring landed around Shetland's shores not only by Shetland and Scottish fishing boats but also Dutch herring busses and even Russian vessels. In 1905, the record year for Shetland's herring fishing industry, over one million barrels of herring were landed and packed at 174 different shore stations. There were large concentrations of such stations at Lerwick; and at Baltasund (Unst) 48 stations employed over 3,000 fishermen and 2,800 shore workers (Heineberg). Many of the shore workers (gutters, packers and coopers) came from the Scottish mainland and Western Isles as well as from Grimsby and other places on the English coast. They lived in huts at the stations and in the evenings there was a good deal of mixing with Shetland girls who also found work there, and with the crews of the herring drifters.

J.F. and T.M. Flett have documented this enlargement of the dance repertory in some detail so it need not be repeated here - though one should add that instruments such as the concertina and melodeon found their way into the islands in the same way. One or two of the incomers actually organized dancing classes. Joan Flett records for example a Mr. Wiseman of Fraserburgh, who visited Uyeasound as a cooper and taught local youngsters free of charge and that a professional dancing master, Ewan Clayton of Elgin, regularly visited Lerwick during this period and even journeyed to Uyeasound and

Baltasund during 1911-13 when he discovered that there were community halls in those places, (personal communication, 1978).

The building of such halls in many rural areas had a profound effect on the dancing habits of Shetlanders and on the role of fiddlers. For one thing, wedding celebrations could move from the croft to the halls, which latter could accommodate far more guests for both feasting and dancing. Village 'rants' and concerts and foys were also now possible in the halls and under these conditions the single, unaccompanied fiddler could not produce enough sound to control the rhythm of the dancing. Pianos came to be used to provide a rhythmic vamp and other available instruments were pressed into service - melodeons and (later) accordions being found much more suitable for the volume of sound needed. The larger floor space not only permitted more than one three-couple set to take the floor for Shetland reels, but also gave room for longways dances, round-the-room waltzes and square-set quadrilles, which would have been impossible to perform properly in the confines of the croft houses. So the fiddlers' repertory was quickly expanded. Finally, the provision of halls meant that dancing sessions tended to become more formal occasions and there was a decline in the frequency of informal croft dancing where the 'hoose fiddler' had been a much valued contributor to evening entertainment.

But we have now reached the period of living memory of many of the fiddlers visited during my own fieldwork, and the more recent history is best told through the words of these informants themselves, many of whom were boys just too young to serve in the first World War.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RECENT HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF LIVING FIDDLERS

The previous chapter should have provided a very generalized picture of Shetland life up to World War I and of the place of the fiddle, virtually the sole musical instrument played for entertainment in those islands. But, as Joan and Tom Flett pointed out in the introductory paragraphs to their chapter on dancing in Shetland (1964, Ch.3, p.59 ff):-

"Before 1914, the lack of good roads on the islands and the relative difficulty of transport by sea in winter tended to make the social life in each crofting township more or less self-contained, and in consequence there were considerable variations in social customs from one township to another."

Later I will attempt to show that local variations, which <sup>the</sup> Fletts emphasized "were greater in Shetland than in most other regions of Scotland", were reflected in the playing styles of fiddlers if one also allows for a varying degree of idiosyncrasy in the playing of certain fiddlers. Hence it seems sensible to take the biographies of individual fiddlers in turn at risk of creating a rather confused picture overall: it is hoped that such confusion will be no more than a reflection of the different experiences of the fiddlers and of the differences between the communities they represent.

When I first undertook fieldwork in Shetland in 1970, early enquiries led me to the better known, more skilful fiddlers, but it soon became apparent that, collectively, they represented only the apex of a pyramid consisting of countless men and a few women who

could play the fiddle to some standard or other. For as I moved around Shetland finding lodgings usually in private homes, I rarely stayed in a house which did not have one or more fiddles and where the man of the house did not admit sooner or later to playing a little himself. It seems that virtually all men earlier this century attempted to master the instrument. Some readily admitted "I could make naethin' oot o' it". Others would class themselves as 'hoose fiddlers' - good enough to play at home for their own and their family's enjoyment, who could manage 'twa-three springs [tunes]' but who would be most unlikely to take their fiddle out with them when going to visit friends. At the apex of the pyramid stand the concert fiddlers who often joined 'concert parties', being prepared to travel to play solo or in ensemble at Foys and Regatta concerts and to play for the dances that regularly rounded off such concerts. Their repertory as often as not included Scottish slow airs and strathspeys as well as Shetland pieces and compositions James Scott Skinner the famous Scottish fiddler-composer who was active around the early years of this century.

Between the concert fiddlers and the 'hoose' fiddler lay a whole spectrum of others. Some were regularly invited to be the leading fiddler at weddings and were expected to take their fiddles with them if they went visiting: their homes were sometimes known as a fiddler's 'hoose' and in winter months would often be visited by friends hoping for a tune and perhaps an opportunity for dancing. Other fiddlers who might be less competent for a variety of reasons, might be prepared to 'spel' (relieve) the leading fiddler by taking over at some time during the long night of dancing to keep the dancing going while the lead fiddler took a well-earned break. As young men, they often took their fiddles with them when going out 'on a spree'

'aroond da hooses' with their friends and, as older men, they might often be asked to play a tune or two when themselves receiving visits from a new generation of young men.

Each of the fiddlers discussed below fit into different places on this fiddler spectrum and it will be seen that his own background, itself a reflection of the community in which he lived and made music, also shows a considerable degree of variety.

#### MAINLAND SHETLAND

Fiddlers on mainland Shetland have had more opportunity to learn Scottish music in addition to Shetland music. In Lerwick there were several teachers of violin who often included Scottish pieces (slow airs, slow strathspeys, pipe marches, etc.) in the repertory they taught. Furthermore, mainland fiddlers were more often able to visit Lerwick and attend the occasional concert and often had more access to gramophone records of Scottish, light classical pieces and non-indigenous dance tunes. As will be seen, for several of them the visits of men like "Da blin fiddler"- George Stark of Dundee- inspired them in their own musical efforts and influenced their repertory considerably.

Bobby Peterson (b.1916) works a small farm at South Califf, Tingwall, 9 miles north of Lerwick. As a young man he went to the Antarctic whaling taking with him his father's fiddle. About his father he says:-

"Me faither was a fiddler but I don't think that his father could do anything.

P.C. Where would your father have picked it up then?

- B.P. Oh - well he picked it up when he was very young - but then you see - he was an old whaler. He went to the Davis Straits and - that sort of thing and a lot of the tunes that he played mebbe - came fae there, Tom. He was shipwrecked at there too.....He was born in 1886 or something, he died when he was 88 - nearly 89.
- T.A. And did any o' the rest of his family play?
- B.P. Yes Tom.....both his brothers played but not much; that little that they never were heard playing - but they could turn a tune for their own amusement.
- P.C. And he used to take his fiddle with him to sea?
- B.P. Oh he - yes - he took his fiddle to sea yes, and he played at the weddings and went you keen - not all over Shetland, but quite a bit away - and the weddings was two or three days at that time. Playing - and just the fiddle, no vampin'.....And I mind me working there with a tractor and them showing me the old house - the remains. And the man saying "this was where dee faither sat up in that corner" and, he says, "yackin at the fiddle" he says, for three solid nights." (SA/1970/277/12)
- That's me faither's fiddle and his uncle before him. And he was a ship's captain and he carried it to sea - and she was back and forwards - he sailed to the States all the time, and Canada .
- P.C. Now did he have to work the ropes or was he just there as a fiddler?
- B.P. Oh no, no, he was just a deck hand, what we call a whaler.
- P.C. Did he get any special privileges though because he was the one with the tunes?
- B.P. No, no, no. But he carried the fiddle there, and of course there might be more fiddlers as him, just the same as when we were going to the whaling there were some good fiddlers - the like of Jacky Laurenson and his late brother, Bob. You see they were crack fiddlers - good fiddlers, and they would play and everybody played a tune and although they were good fiddlers they were just as keen to hear the like of me playing a tune - that could na look at it you see. Well, there it was. Everybody - some likit to hear you playing and some likit to hear the next een playing. And this was how it was. (SA/1970/278/1)
- P.C. Did he ever tell you much about fiddling on board?
- B.P. No, he just used to speak about it having a sort of, you ken - in the mess room, playing, among themselves. Different men played, you see, there were so many different men on the whaler.
- P.C. Would they all be Shetlanders?
- B.P. Oh no, no, no, no, only some Shetlanders. A lot fae Dundee



and around that quarter.

P.C. And any from, say, England and Norway?.

B.P. Oh yes, yes. Different anes.

P.C. Did he ever pick up any Norwegian tunes?

B.P. No, but he picked up a lot of - fae further afield, you know, like away up when they were in the Davis Straits - and around that quarter you see. They used to - you ken- get tunes. A lot of them they reckon come, came fae there.

P.C. Are there any that you mind?

B.P. Ah, I can't say. As I say, he had so many, you understand, and of course this same tune that I played first - this Wullafjord, I think that was picked up..... I never heard me father, you see, ever playing what we call a chord - he would never end up playing a chord.

P.C. Did they use the open strings alot?

B.P. Oh a lot - and very often - the soond o' the two like. [plays d'/d and g/G and illustrates their use in The Flowers of Edinburgh].... but no much chords...

(SA/1970/279/4)

P.C. How many fiddlers would your father play with?

B.P. Oh - sometimes it was just the one fiddler. I remember being at the fiddle - being at a wedding in Gott hall.. and that was just the one fiddler - and he just died a few weeks ago. Abernethy fae - Tresta, just there sitting - and he wasna much of a fiddler, I doot he didna hae much o' a bow mind you. There were a big crowd and he was just there himself and he stuck at it oot the whole night.

(SA/1970/279/179)

About his family's Christmas morning tradition, he said:-

B.P. He [his father] took out the bottle first - everybody got a dram.

T.A. What time would this have been?

B.P. Oh, this would have been about half-past five in the morning. Very early..... and everybody got a dram, and he took a good one for himself, and then he would go out and do his morning work you keen, and cleared up everything. Then he would come - and the breakfast would be ready - and then he would just tak the fiddle. A few drams was in him already you see, and he was feeling like a tune and he would start. Everybody would come in - go around with the bottle you see, it was just - oh the fiddle every time.

T.A. This would be the neighbours coming?

B.P. The neighbours coming, yes - around with the bottle.



P.C. Where did he keep the fiddle did you say?

B.P. Just lying on top o' the bed - a bed in the kitchen - which every old Shetland house had. What we call a box bed. And he kept it lying on the top - the bed-clothes you know. The bed was made up properly - and then the fiddle lay there like that. And he just took a hold like that and just started to play. And some would come in and have a good drink and there'd be a dance on the floor - and more drams - and this went on the whole day and then it was done at night when the work was finished. Then she went steady right through till maybe two o'clock the next morning. And if there was a dance in the Hall then of course the young ones went, but there was always an old sailor comin' in along. And I'm telling you, we were playing, and then next day there were a very great drought on - everybody was crabbit!

B.P. Every note that they played, the auld Shetland dancers had a step for it - you see - every one. And it was played slowly - and every note, Peter, had a slight different variation of the step. You mind that, the old Shetland reel. [He demonstrates on his fiddle and then plays faster.] You couldna possibly dance tae that.

(SA/1974/2/6)

B.P. Like my case, my father was a good old Shetland fiddler, played at the dances, played at the weddings, just himself you keen, just solo. And it was a hard job, mind you, just playing. But then there was so much noise and that, they reckoned for a while, sometimes he just used to reach the bow ower, keep the bow goin' - he never did the fingers at all. Then as soon as the heukin died down then he stuck in til her again.

J.C. That's where this lang drawn bow on the back strings come fae. Oh yes.

B.P. But I mean to say, I sat and listened to him playing and I was terrible keen.

(SA/1977/120/)

He received no formal instruction in fiddling himself.

B.P. Well, I started with sitting watching me faither playing, just sitting watching. Then I just used to tak it you ken and just sit and try.....I pickit it up you keen, a bit. But I was very very keen, and awfu' quick o' the ear you keen. If I'd heard Jim playin' a tune, some o' yon fine tunes he's played tonight, tomorrow it would come to me mind, and I would get it man, it would be there just the same as he was playing into me lug. Quick as lightning. And I would go to the Haa, and the dancing would be goin' on, and the heukin and the birlin [spinning around with one's partner] and the carry-on you keen, and that barn would be goin' up. And man, maybe next day, I'll be maybe workin in the mud or in the hay you keen, and I'll maybe lie down on this hay, wi' a fine summer day. Heavens! You could hear that fiddle goin' as if it'd been there. And you would lie and listen and that tune would just float - and you would have it.

(SA/1977/120/6)

B.P. I was very interested in it, Peter....I'd gone miles, and if I was goin' by a hoose and I heard the fiddle, just like tonight....I'll certainly knock, but if nobody come I'll just wait for he finishes. I was keen you see. When in wir young days that the Blin' Fiddler would come here - I think I told you all that afore - he would come up here, old Stark.....an' then somebody would say, 'Boy, the Blin' Fiddler's come'. Well then, the first Saturday night, the boy next door to me, we're off to the toon - walkit there you see - and, we'll be goin' in ower and you'll hear the strains o' old George. He'll be playing something, wi' Frankie Duncan [his guitarist].... And I and, then of course, a group around him. And dan these days Lerwick in the summer time was packed you keen. O heavens! You could hardly move wi' fokk. And he would have a great audience, you see, he was a good fiddler.

P.C. Did he ever play for dancing?

B.P. He did. He come up here and stayed some winters and played all the time. Goin' tae as many dances as du wanted, that he could manage. Oh yes.

P.C. But they were more interested in listening?

B.P. Yes you, well he stood in the street you see, and then he passed around the hat. He had a guitarist wi' him, Willie Jordan. He's still living; but George has got his. An' I hev the photo of them at home..... he was a fine man, you keen. And he used to stay right across fae the Queen's [Hotel]... an' I'll go wi' the milk to the Queen's in the morning and then I'll go aye in... and he'd gae oot the fiddle, that time o' the morning, you keen, and play. And there were a tune going then that they called Glen Grant strathspey. An I was awful keen on this tune and he would play this Glen Grant. Of course, then he would gi' me it an' I'll play a tune or twa... but, man that was just a big thrill. Every Saturday night then we were fur the toon... to listen to Stark playing. Ah well, it was good. And then he would play yon up at the Market Cross. And then he would go to the head of the pier and then he would go over half along the street.... and when he was leaving, the boat was turning and going, then he was playing Glen Grant - standing right on the stern..... Oh there were just fishermen.... just the general public - for Shetland was just keen on music you see, and the fiddler appealed very much to them.... and he made a lot o money.

(SA/1977/121/8)

P.C. When you first were learning then you would play it at your father's speed, you'd sit down one on either side of the fireplace?

B.P. Exactly. And then you see when we went to start to go to the Hall and we heard Tom [Anderson] comin' oot and giving right fiddling, we got completely sickened with this sort of thing - well it was no use at all..... he was playing Skinner stuff you see and all this - lovely tunes - High Level, Banks Hornpipe - and man we thought this was great....We had no more use for this old stuff at all - we were keen on pickin' up tunes that we were hearing Tom playing you see.

(SA/1977/277/4)

P.C. Have you played at weddings too?

B.P. Yes, yes...But when we were playing at weddings it was more or less, you ken, a bit of a band playing - tae the dance after a wedding. (SA/1970/277/12)

B.P. And I remember playing at a wedding in Walls, just a cottage wedding, and there were some people at it from Voe direction up in a place they call Collafirth. And, through the night - this fellow come up to me and he says 'Could I play a Shetland reel?' 'Well' I says, 'Yes, what tune would you like?' 'Well' He says, 'any of the old ones.....preferably Soldiers' Joy'. And of course they announced the Shetland reel, that man and and quite a few of them went up. Oh man, beautiful, beautiful dancers.

P.C. Did you have someone to vamp then?

B.P. Yes, there were an accordion there and they had a guitar - there were quite a few of those you see - two boys from Quarff that were pretty good guitarists and accordion. And I was playing the fiddle. And of course, they come here sometimes and we'll have a tune.

P.C. Did you find that the accordion drowns the fiddle?

B.P. Oh I do, yes, it does, Peter. It helps a bit if you get out in the front a bit and keep them at the back. It all depends on the type of player.

P.C. Were there very many other folk playing the fiddle in your father's time or would you say there were more fiddlers after his time?

B.P. There were quite a few fiddlers around. Some of them, you know.... didna jus', as you would say, come out in the open. They played the fiddle right enough. And if they got a [dram] -

P.C. What you call house fiddlers?

B.P. Exactly, yes, and, if you knew they played, you'd go in. You might have a bit of enticing to do before they did play. When they started away they were good. Sometimes it took a dram or two to get them started....but nevertheless there were always that fiddler or two that was coming til a concert giving selections and that sort of thing. Some fiddlers is very hard to get started to play. You'll have to wait quite a while. Once they start, away they go. And yet the next man will jist take up a fiddle and do what he can and lay it by and say 'Well, that's that'. (SA/1974/2/9)

P.C. And you still play pretty often yourself?

B.P. Oh yes, Play pretty often. Yes, some days at dinner time I'll take it out to go in the back kitchen and have a tune or two, you ken. Sometimes it sounds fine and other times - ach- it doesn't seem right, and you put it away: yes, doesn't seem to sound right, you think you're goin' aback instead of ahead. (SA/1970/279/3)

Bobbie Peterson has composed a number of reels himself at various times. I questioned him about one of the most recent tunes:-

P.C. How long did it take you to make that up?

B.P. The tune? Well it took it mebbe took a couple o' weeks and then you see....me son-in-law hed a smaa recorder you see...then I got him to tak it doon because you see, no' having the music, I was apt to forget it you see.

P.C. But how did you start off?

B.P. Oh, I just started off - just with the first half, just try - just sitting' in the hoose just trying; and I thinks t'm'self I'll need to try and mak a tune, and see if I can mak something. And I got going, and then I started on the second half you see. And it's a bit of a job if you don't know the music you see, because, as I say, you're apt to get it fine, 'n you say - 'Well that's a lovely ending now' - and you canna mind it, you see, next time. But I got going, and when I heard it on the tape you see, then I - I hed it.

P.C. Now once you heard it on the tape, did you change it around a bit?

B.P. A bit, yes, I altered it a bit.

P.C. And it took you about -

B.P. Oh, it took a few weeks to work on it you see.

P.C. Each day, you did a bit?

B.P. Oh no, just a day noo an' again, just when I hed time.

(SA/1970/278/7)

P.C. What about New Years Day?

B.P. Oh, it was just the same - next week come again. But mind you, we didn't have Christmas you know on the 25th. Oh no - it was on the 5th January.

T.A. It was the fifth?

B.P. Aye.

T.A. It was the sixth in oor place.

B.P. Fifth in Tingwall and it was fae Gott and sooth - you know where Gott is - was New Christmas you see. Fae Gott and north it was Old Christmas. And you see, what we did, we went guizing and all that, and we took up a hand with them when they did Christmas and then when it came to our one, they came north you see. It was all right.....

P.C. Did the fiddlers play any special tunes for Guizers?

B.P. Oh no, it just - a tune that they could dance to.....old  
Shetland tunes you see - that was all that they knew to play.  
(SA/1970/278/1)

Fiddling today

Bobbie Peterson's daughters learned violin for a time from a  
Lerwick music teacher, Mr. Macardo, but a recent change has been the  
introduction of traditional fiddle instruction in local authority  
schools.

P.C. And what about the fiddle today now in Shetland?

B.P. Well, I would say, I would think Jim, will you agree, fiddlin'  
is comin' up.

J.C. The fiddlers are comin' up this last while, mainly owing to  
Tommy [Anderson].

B.P. This bairns is all being taught.

(SA/1977/120/6)

Robert Bairnson (b. 1906) A crofter at Dunrossness (south Mainland)  
and a local bard. He has been a member of the Shetland Folk Society  
fiddle band since 1960 but does not attend that often, partly because  
of the distance between his home and Lerwick. Until joining the band  
he knew only Scottish tunes and The Shaalds of Foula. One reason for  
the absence of a more clearly indigenous repertory must have been  
religious attitudes in his district and another that he was taught  
more or less formally, learning notation at the same time, by a local  
minister.

J.T. Reid recorded that

'about the year 1840, a period of religious revival in  
Shetland, the Yule festivities began to decline, the fiddle  
was proscribed, dancing prohibited, music (with the exception  
of hymn tunes) and all external manifestations of merriment,  
discouraged. There is an opinion in many country parishes,  
particularly among the old people, that every kind of music  
not sacred is sinful'

(1869, p.57).



Dunrossness was, apparently, one of the parishes severely affected by this attitude. Here Mr. Bairnson recounts to the writer and to Dr. Tom Anderson a story from his grandmother's time:-

R.B. Old Nicol Sinclair was a fiddler....and he was just called Nicky, Nicky o' Voe, and he was a fiddler. Noo, they hed their rants down there, but hit was looked upon very....looked doon upon this rants.

T.A. This was because of religion?

R.B. Religion, yes, an' I can tell thee a story about that....There were one night that my uncle Robbie, he died in Australia, but he was a young fellow then, and my Auntie Katie, they were goin' to Nicky's rant....Anyway, old Robbie [his grandfather] he got some kind of a, something, he knew that there was something on, and this twa was goin' tae this rant, he was an elder o' the Kirk, a religious man. An' he never said a word, but he got a piece of paper, and he wrote on this paper, printed on this paper 'Shun evil companions' and he stuck it up on the [chimney] breast. Never was a word said, but they never göd to the rant. Mebbe they'd may have been afore, but they [never] göd after this. Anybody that was going tae Nicky's rants was going tae the devil. A rant was a dance.

Mrs.R.B. Well, we used to - the term 'rant' if we were just goin' oot to have some fun, we were gaein' oot fir a rant.

R.B. They stopped 'rants' long ago, before my time, I don't remember it. We used to have bits of dances here. Now there's nothing.

(SA/1971/210/5)

In another amusing tale the fiddler won a temporary victory over the anti-dancing zealots using the fiddle itself to rescue what should have been a joyful social event from disaster.

R.B. Now I'll tell you another story - an' I heard this - now me old grandmother, that's her picture o' her sittin' up there - that was my 'Ness grandmother - died within Yell in 1901 or something. Yonder was a very broad-minded old body, and I mind I've heard she were a fine old wife, boy - many a fun wi' her. And she likit to tell a funny story too. Anyhow, when my Uncle Willie married in 1892, he married a Baptist and she was very religious.....and they hed their reception - they were likely married in the old Kirk, I don't know - but they hed the reception here in wir old barn as is out yonder at the back. And dere were a sort of a mixed crowd o' family, half Baptists and half 'hobos' and what laek - something like mesel. Well now, there were to be no music and no dancing at this wedding.

T.A. What were there going to be then?

R.B. Well, jest du wait a bit. Er, in the old barn they were playin' a game 'at they called "Kissin' ower da Windlin". Now I'll tell you how this, now I never saw this done, but I've heard it explained be that old wife an' me father an all. Me father thought this wes a great joke as well, I think. He was a bit broad-minded himself. Anyhow, a 'windlin', a bundle o' straw, was laid down on the barn floor, an' all the guests were sitten aroond on battens an' barrels around the barn, an', er, one was picked on to go doon first, an' he went doon on his knees on this windlin', maybe leaning on the windlin', I never saw it done. And he looked aroond the congregation, and some lass. And he pointed at her, and she hed to come doon and kneel at the ether side of the windlin, and they kissed ower the windlin - and the fellow that was doon first, he got up and the lass look aroond and she called on some fellow and he came down, and he kissed her ower da windlin and then she got up and the next fellow, he's here and he points at the next one, next lass, and so agon. This would be carried on for a while until they were getting tired o' it, and then they were hangin' aroond and there were no music, there were nothing; and old - my old grandmother yonder - she tow't that this was nae goin' to go on at all. Now there were a Johnny Jamieson that stayed over here at the village - he was the son o' Jamieson that was lost oot here off the Columbine when Betty Mowat drifted ta Norrway - Myra Black's uncle, Myra's over here yet. My grandmother kent he hed a fiddle and kent he played some. She says 'Lord bless dee boy, gae hame and get dee fiddle and see if du can get some life with in this. So he göd and he got up within the kiln door and he's playin' awa and they're dancin' Shetland reels or something. But the Baptists, they cleared oot. Lord kens whar dey göd, I don't know. Then, this was cairried on for a while and then Johnny Jamieson either hed to ging oot for a little refreshment, or for a pee, I don't know; but he laid doon the fiddle and the music stopped. And then the Baptists cam in. Now, there was a Jimmy Irvine at lived down here at South Voe, just doon past this old hoose. He could play none on the fiddle, but when he was aware o' the Baptists comin' in, he got the fiddle and he scruttit the bow ower the strings and made a deevil of a noise and the Baptists cleared oot again. Boy - I'm heard this telt be me old grandmother in me father's hoose and it's true as can be. And dan he says 'Keep wir hoose boys, keep wir hoose' and he scrüttit the bow ower da strings and oot göd the Baptists. And then when the music stoppit they come in again.

T.A. What objection did they have to the fiddle?

R.B. Well, du kens.....the fiddle was the devil's instrument and so was the cairds - cos Robbie Burns speaks about that 'He drinks and swears an' plays at cairds but steals awa.....'

(SA/1972/200/2)

Like many other fiddlers, Robert Bairnson remembers vividly the sight of fiddlers playing at a dance inspiring him to take up the fiddle.

R.B. The 2nd of January 1920 was a social evening and that was the first dance that ever was been at the bottom hall.....and I



was a member of this - a young fellow. There was a lot o' wir young fellows - goin' tae the school still - that was attending this.....Well, boy, there were Jock Youngclaus and there were his brother Tammy..... and this George R. Goudie - he was a bit of a, he played the fiddle. He was a bit 'class'. And there were Harry Manson on the mandolin, I dinna ken if there was a piano.

Mrs.R.B.I dinna think it.

R.B. Well, I'd never been at anything there afore, and they were goin' at this dancing, I'd never seen any dancing. But, boy, dis fiddles upon da platform, I stood there, open mouthed, just watchin'. I wasna carin' about the dancing at all.

P.C. What dances were they dancing?

R.B. Oh, it was the Quadrilles and the Lancers, and mebbe Bostons and mebbe Shetland reels, yea. (SA/1972/200/7)

A friend repaired his father's broken fiddle:-

R.B. He was goin' to sea in a sixereen - and he got her fae ... the boy that was on the sixereen, Geordie Black I think his name was. Well me father, he could play a tune or twa, but he was what we called 'semi-tummer', you could ken the tune but she wasn't accurate. Well, he was laid this fiddle by - he was lyin' up in the loft, all gone to pieces. Bobbie, he went up there, he got the fiddle doon and he got it glued together. But what a mess he made [o' it]. I didna ken nae better then, but I only kent afterward, it was all glue clackit everywhere. (SA/1971/200/7)

Robbie Bairnson was about 10 then and first learned Soldiers' Joy from a friend and after that several tunes from his mother's playing on the 'peerie accordion' (concertina). They included Sailor Ower the Rough Trees (the Scottish strathspey, Lady Mary Ramsay, played as a reel), The Wind that Shakes the Barley, My Love, she's but a Lassie Yet, and One, Two, Three-a-leery. He bought Honeyman's Tutor, but 'could make nothing of it' until the local minister began teaching violin. He began winter classes in 1931 and taught for 3 years. At one time the class contained 32 fiddler novices:-

R.B. And fiddles was come oot under beds, and from aff o' lofts, that never wis been played on, and they couldna bide in tune..... it was all gut strings. And they were crackin' aff and goin' wi' a bang. He hed to get them aa tuned and they could never bide in tune. The fiddles was na right tuned, but that was all right and Mrs. Anderson she hed the blackboard, and she drew the five lines and used that. You started off wi' that, an' we got a peerie tutor, it was very good -



Da Blin Fiddler, George Stark with his accompanist  
Lerwick, 1958 (Photo. R. Young)

'Allan's Violin Tutor' or something..... This gōd on the whole winter once that we got the kind o' idea of music into wir heids. Well, I got it into me heid better 'n I could do it somehow. I understood the thing and yet I wasn't very good at it. I kent what it meant but yet I couldna do it - but that happens wi' some kind o' things.

(SA/1972/200/4)

Despite the fact that the minister was teaching pieces like Handel's Largo and Rubinstein's Melody in F, some of the local population were not pleased with this teaching, for religious objections to the fiddle still persisted. On being asked if he knew any tunes peculiar to Dunrossness, Robbie Bairnson replied:-

R.B. Ness tunes? The only one I ever heard playin' around here was Jock Youngclaus. Man, this was a dead place. It's the same yet and it's getting worse..... I used to play at that dances away in the 1930s. I used to play alongside of Jock Youngclaus and then after the War we played some, until they began to work with the Bands. And there were a feller, he belonged to Yorkshire - er Watty. He married a lass, here in Scousburgh, he was on the drums. And there were a John Burgess, he was good on the piano or on the piano accordion. Just the usual tunes for Eightsomes, Quadrilles, Lancers, Boston Two-Step.

(SA/1971/200/6)

Mr. Bairnson is a skilled joiner and in his spare time he makes and repairs fiddles. He travels infrequently into Lerwick (25 miles north) to play with other fiddlers because winter nights are so rough.

TOM ANDERSON

Tom Anderson occupies a uniquely important place in Shetland fiddling for a number of reasons. He was born in 1910 into a crofter-fisherman family in Eshaness (north Mainland), a family which was very active musically. He inherited a fiddle from an uncle when he was three and began to learn from another uncle (his mother's brogher, Willie) at the age of 8. While this uncle played much Scottish music for dancing ~~in the local hall~~, his grandfather who

lived a few miles away at Hamnavoe, played a traditional Shetland repertory. Tom remembers being taken to his first dance during World War I at the age of 4-5 and even earlier remembers his mother dancing in his croft house when a party of guisers arrived one Yuletide. His mother played the organ at the local church. His father played the button-key melodeon and could sing from sol-fa notation. All his brothers and sisters learned instruments and became musically literate though, like Tom, they received little, if any, formal instruction. He recalls his uncle giving him one lesson in notation:-

"He gave me a page out of Kerr's First [Collection of Merry Melodies.... for the violin. Bk.1, Glasgow, [n.d.]), and he drew five lines and he says 'Your second space up is your open string' and he says 'Your second space up is your open second string and you can work in your fingering between that.' And I started from there and I sat upstairs and I worked it out and I couldn't work out the time and my mother would come up and say 'There's something wrong there, it can't be like that' and she'd say 'Now you have to learn timing'. That's how I started to read - the only lessons I ever had."

(SA/1979/174)

Like most country boys he had only an elementary schooling, leaving at the age of 14 and taking a £1 share in an open fishing boat for two winter fishing seasons while doing odd jobs in the summer, carting peats for crofters. By that time he was already playing for dances and years later, when his younger brothers and sisters were old enough, he formed a family band consisting of two fiddles (self and brother), guitar (another brother) auto-harp (sister), accordion (a friend) and home-made drums (sister's boy friend). Their repertory included one-steps, the Fetlar Foxtrot, Old-Time Waltzes (including the St. Bernards and the Velita), polkas, Schottisches, Scotch reels, Shetland reels, The Lancers, Eightsome reels and the Military Two-Step.

In 1926 he took a correspondence course in radio and soon after set up a small business building radios. He also invested in a silent

35 mm. film projector, built an amplifier, adapted an old gramophone and travelled the countryside showing silent films and bringing on his dance band for the second half of each evening's entertainment. He had, as a result, ample opportunity to hear Scottish and other music from radio and records and his band was obviously popular - "I remember playing at 32 weddings one winter".

World War II brought him into contact with many other styles of music when he joined the R.A.F. and became a radar mechanic, and it was perhaps a shock to find out that the repertory so popular in his own islands was considered out of date outside Shetland and that the fiddle was rarely to be found in urban dance bands.

"Then I made up my mind in India that if I got back I would concentrate on Shetland music until I collected [died]."

P.C. "Why did you make up your mind about it?"

T.A. Well, cos I heard the native music in India and I thought well, if I ever get back I'm not going to bother about this dance-band jazz. I'm going to start seeing about my own music. I saw that if they [Indians] had this thing going why shouldn't I collect ours. Well, I'd learned a lot of Shetland tunes but when I came back, it was '46, and I started to rehabilitate myself and the very first night home they came and asked me to come and play at a dance. And I hadn't touched the fiddle for a while - but I went over and I played, and this was these young people - they didn't even know who I was and I was very insulted and this old guy said - 'Caw, that's Tom Anderson man, he was the dance band leader for the whole of Shetland.' 'Oh!' - it was very funny - I'd been out of Shetland for five years.

(SA/1979/174)

A friendship with Patrick Shuldham-Shaw who visited Shetland during the late 1940s, had a powerful effect on him:-

"And then I really got obsessed with it, the Folk Society'd been formed then [1946] and I formed a young band to do Scottish dance music to bring them up to radio standard and at the same time I was collecting Shetland music and I was playing for a Scottish dance class - in Lerwick - but I was still collecting Shetland music and that was the major thing, so it was a very busy time - and the Insurance Company wasn't too pleased at times, when I wasn't giving them enough time."

(SA/1979/174)



Jock Youngclaus with a fiddle of his own making  
c. 1950-1955



Tom Anderson (standing) - with the Shetland Folk Society Band  
(1947)

His involvement with the Scottish idiom caused him to study the intricacies of strathspey bowing seriously and he made several visits to Aberdeen to get advice from expert fiddlers there, such as Hector MacAndrew, Bill Hardie and John Murdoch Henderson. Like several other able Mainland fiddlers, Tom looked for technical challenges from the Scottish fiddle tradition, but at no time did he receive instruction other than

"One or two tips in the Services from classical violinists, 'cos I was always roped into small orchestras - that's all it was. I wasn't really interested to be quite frank. I lost interest in classics after the war completely when I went into Scottish an' Shetland." (SA/1979/174)

The war had stimulated other men to take an interest in their indigenous traditions. The Shetland Folk Society had been formed by the time Tom Anderson returned home and in 1947 he was asked to lead the small folk fiddle band which had been formed. Their repertory consisted of traditional Shetland tunes collected from various areas, and many of them have since been published by the Folk Society in their folk books and in Da Mirrie Dancers. This band only rarely played for dances.

Tom Anderson's later career is better known. He founded the Shetland Fiddlers' Society in 1960 (the so-called Forty Fiddlers) and on his retirement from insurance work (1971) he became the first official teacher of traditional fiddling in Shetland schools. In 1977 he was awarded the M.B.E. for his services to Shetland music and a year later he gave up his work in Schools, handing it over to a former pupil.

Tom Anderson's playing is featured on several records: Shetland Folk Fiddling, volume 1 - The Silver Bow (Topic 12TS 281, 1976); Shetland Folk Fiddling, volume 2 (Topic 12TS 379, 1978); and





Tom Anderson and 'The Young Shetland Players'  
(1936)



Tom Anderson - recording 'Old Willie Hunter'  
(c.1954)

Shetland Fiddlers (LED 2052, 1971). In a co-operative effort with Pam Swing, an American music student, he produced Haand me doon da fiddle, a collection of 55 tunes published in print and on cassette by the University of Stirling Centre for continuing education. The tunes are mostly of Shetland origin and contain a few of the 500 tunes he himself has composed as well as one or two tunes composed by school children. In 1980 Tom Anderson was rewarded for his services to music and to the teaching of traditional music by an honorary doctorate at Stirling University.

Other Mainland fiddlers whom the writer has recorded include the late Henry Thomson and 'old' Willie Hunter. Both were older friends of Tom Anderson. Henry Thomson came from Vidlin but spent most of his life as a grocer in Ollaberry. Willie Hunter, by profession a blacksmith, was from Nesting and, like Tom Anderson, was one of the earliest members of the Shetland Folk Society band. Neither man was so eclectic musically as Tom Anderson, though, like other less well-known Mainland fiddlers, they would have had the chance to hear a good deal more Scottish fiddling, both live and on record, than fiddlers from other islands. They would have met and heard Geordie Stark for instance. Yet both are said to have preserved distinct regional styles representative of Vidlin and Nesting respectively, though it might be more accurate to say that their styles have since come to be regarded as representative of those districts (see chapter 4).

Henry Thomson pointed to the problem of identifying regional as opposed to idiosyncratic styles with his recollection of the period immediately following World War I:-

H.T. Du sees, in Vidlin there were a hell of a lot of fiddlers. Every second chap played it. You jest played a set of

Quadrilles - laid it doon - to hell wi' it. The next chap was there - tak it up - that many fiddlers.

P.C. Did they all play in the same way, or did they all have different styles?

H.T. Naw, they were all different styles, you know.

(SA/1970/259/11)

Today Vidlin is so depopulated that one can no longer research the problem there and the same is true of Nesting.

Henry Thomson also pointed out the hiatus in the fiddle tradition and the rapid change caused by World War I. Older fiddlers made way for younger men and boys with a more modern fiddle hold and with a 'better' technique altogether:-

H.T. During the first World War there were no dances or weddings. Nothing.

T.A. Everybody was away of course.

H.T. So we were, as du would say, practising home - and when the war was finished there were a lot of big weddings..... and of course we were young starters d'sees. And then they'd come and say - one wife said - 'Come on, play this' - we were shy - a bit shy du knowest. [But] we were comin' up. When we started of course, there were nae mair o' them [old fiddlers] at all.

(SA/1970/259/11)

#### WHALSAY

The island of Whalsay is a mere 8 square miles in area, but despite its size, its population (997 in 1976) is almost equal to that of Unst or Yell, the latter being ten times the size of Whalsay. Whalsay is today a prosperous fishing community with a fine natural harbour and more modern fishing vessels than any other community, including Lerwick. This prosperity is, however, comparatively recent and many older inhabitants can recall tales of harder days when their ancestors were forced to fish for the laird - the Bruce family which



was established at Symbister House.

Judging by tune titles in the repertory of Whalsay fiddlers, there has been considerable influence from Scotland, probably before the present century, for many of these tunes belong to an eighteenth century Scottish repertory which is now rarely heard on the Scottish mainland. One Whalsay inhabitant, Robert Irvine (the local Registrar) believes the tunes may have been introduced by one, John Newbigging, who came with his family to Whalsay some time prior to the 1861 census as farm grieve for the laird. He was apparently a good fiddler and some of the Whalsay repertory is associated with his name (as Robert Irvine put it: "that was one of old Bigging's tunes"). However, Newbigging, who came from the village of Broughton, near Peebles, may have been only one of a succession of Scots who came to work for the Bruces and brought Scottish music with them.

The island has had a lively fiddle playing tradition until comparatively recently, when accordions and guitars have become highly popular with younger men and boys. In 1977 only one boy was learning to play the fiddle and there were no young men or boys who could play. Of the two men of working age who played for dances and at concerts, one was an incomer. However, many older men played, mostly for their own amusement, and earlier this century a number of fiddlers were highly esteemed by the Whalsay people. Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, who visited the island in 1947, heard, but could not record, the playing of Magnus Hutchison of Brough, who was regarded by many as the best Whalsay fiddler of this century.

Both Shuldham-Shaw and Tom Anderson recorded the playing of John Irvine, or 'Old Glibey' as he was affectionally known, who was the most popular fiddler in the island during the 1950s. John Irvine was

also interviewed fairly extensively by J.F. and T.M. Flett and it is from him that they obtained many of the details of the part ritually played by fiddlers at weddings in Whalsay. John Irvine was evidently a popular fiddler at weddings, which in Whalsay have been, and still are, major events often involving everyone in the island. A comparison of his playing with that of a younger contemporary, Andrew Poleson, whose repertory and style I explored in depth during my research, suggests that Whalsay's social integration but comparative isolation from other communities produced a clearly recognisable Whalsay style of playing, which was shared by older fiddlers in spite of inevitable personal differences.

Among contemporaries of Andrew Poleson, whose playing I listened to and recorded, were John Anderson (Hillend), Robert D. Anderson (Symbister), William Williamson (Marrister) and William Robertson and John Hughson (both of Isbister). Common ingredients in their style are clearly recognisable though Andrew Poleson has illustrated differences in playing style between his own and that of "the Isbister fiddlers" whose small community lives on the east coast of the island, barely two miles across the moor from Symbister and Brough.

ANDREW POLESON (d. 1979)

Andrew was born in Brough, a township two miles north of the harbour township of Symbister. He began to attempt the fiddle by the time he was 12:-

A.P. When I started first to play, I had the fiddle tuned to doh, me, soh, doh - and it didn't correspond you see - my ear told me that I was wrong.

(SA/1971/269)

For the first few years he played on a borrowed fiddle, learning tunes from his mother and absorbing style and technique informally from a number of active fiddlers.

A.P. She used to sing, you see, and we used to dance, just young boys - and I think I picked them up faster when I was younger than I probably would do now, and I knew a lot of them and I never lost them.

P.C. And what about the style of playing you have?

A.P. Well, I picked that off me uncle and there's one fellow lost in the war that I used to stand and listen to him playing - Willie Hutchison, up there at Creadie Knowe. I could stand out behind the yard - what we called the yard dykes - and listen, if it was a fine night, listen to him playing you see. And I can remember William Aitchison, that was the old man, playing, and there was a man lived next door to us that used to play, Johnnie Williamson. So I always had the chance of learning..... But I start to learn how to play up at Houll beside the young chap by the name of Laurie Houston. He was very poor - you know - deformed. And we used to go up there, more so to keep him company and he like the - he had a fiddle of his own - and he liked us to come and play, me and some o' th'other chaps..... We used to go up there, and we were up there many times and we'd play - learn to play up there. And I would come down and sometimes I would go up in the dark loft, sit and play in the darkness to myself so as I could annoy nobody.....

(SA/1971/217/14)

A.P. I knew a lot of tunes, just myself like, I could sing them, and I knew when I was wrong and when I was going on right.

P.C. Were they all dancing tunes?

A.P. Oh, they were all dancing tunes. Yes. (SA/1971/269/3)

For most Whalsay fiddlers, and indeed fiddlers in other communities, the time they were first invited to play at a dance was regarded as a milestone in their progress as, for example, in the case of Gilbert Hutchison, a native of Whalsay and one of the two active fiddlers mentioned earlier:-

G.H. There were nae accordions or nothing then.

P.C. When did you first play?

G.H. The first wedding I played at I was fifteen. That's the same Willie Williamson that sings those sangs - his wedding. I mind Willie in here axing me to play, and I never kent whether

I could play or [not].

P.C. Were you the only fiddler?

G.H. Well I was the kind o'...

P.C. The chief fiddler?

G.H. I don't know about the chief ane but I was the ane that was supposed to, kind of, keep it going you see.

P.C. And the others gave you relief every now and then?

G.H. Yes. It was just fiddles then - there were never any pianos there to accompany them. It was a hard night's work.

(SA/1971/215/8)

In the case of John Irvine (d.1960s), Andrew Poleson's older contemporary) the first money he ever earned was for playing at a dance and this was before he reached school leaving age. (William Hutchison, SA/1972/100).

Andrew Poleson was between 18 and 20 years old before he first played at a dance.

A.P. It would have been at the Isbister Hall I suppose, at a wedding, about the first time that ever I tried to play there for dancing. Sometimes they were stuck for fiddlers, then they, they would come and take a hold of you and you couldn't get out, you didn't want to play but they seized you and hauled you and - they only had the one fiddler you see probably, and nobody there could play so that's how I started.  
(SA/1971/217)

He played frequently after that and recalls:-

A.P. I got as high as thirty bob at one time. Playing at the weddings, among the last lot of big weddings that I played at.  
(SA/1972/100)

Other instruments were introduced during Andrew's playing years but nevertheless the people of Whalsay have a special affection for the fiddle:-

A.P. Well it was aa the fiddle and there's nothing that they approved o' like the fiddle. The fiddle was the only instrument that was in the island when I was young. There was nothing else, no guitars - no - but there might ha been accordion, a button-key, the old type accordion. There was





Having a tune with Henry Thomson (1970)



Andrew Poleson (1971)

none of this piano accordions in them days, no such thing, it was jest a fiddle. If there was a wedding on there was just one of two chaps 'at could play the fiddle, the one helped the other. They would take it hour about, like on the fiddle like. It was all Shetland reels generally.

(SA/1977/104/16)

In 1979 the Whalsay dance band consisted of several accordions and melodeons, guitars, fiddle and drums. However, even then at dances when a Shetland reel was announced, a fiddler was asked to play for it, usually either Gilbert Hutchison or Alan Tulloch, or both. The others take a rest. Andrew Poleson is convinced (like many) that a band isn't complete without a fiddle:-

A.P. In that big hall you would'na hear one fiddle - no, you would'na hear it at all, too much noise. [At a wedding] it's always bands.

P.C. And is there always a fiddler in the band?

A.P. Aye. A band is never as it should be withoot the fiddle.

P.C. That's what people consider?

A.P. Oh, its always best with having the fiddle like.

P.C. Yes. Even though you cannot hear it for the accordions?

A.P. Oh, you can always hear the fiddle - you'll hear the fiddle whatever band you're listening to, even on the wireless or the television. You can always pick out the fiddle from your ear like.

P.C. Yes.

A.P. Yea - there's nothing like [the fiddle.]...

(SA/1977/104/16)

This view is shared by others throughout the Shetland Isles.

Andrew Poleson was no longer playing for dancing when I began my fieldwork, but was always a welcome member of the team of 'cooks' who were invited to prepare food for 'big' weddings. This team consisted of older men who were happy to miss the wedding dance itself and who met in the 'cook's house' - a room on the end of John Irvine's family crofthouse at Saltness, close to Symbister hall<sup>h</sup> were wedding<sup>k</sup>



'The Cook's House', Whalsay: while mutton is boiled up for the wedding feast, the older men sing, yarn and enjoy the fiddle  
1973



Alan Tulloch (1977)

dances were held - to chop up and boil mutton, which was then taken up to the hall throughout the night as the dancers ate in shifts. The cooks were well supplied with alcoholic refreshment and by the time the last cauldron of meat had been taken up (usually around 2.30am.) they were ready for singing and fiddling and other merriment. Andrew was usually invited and of course was expected to bring his fiddle.

#### ALAN TULLOCH

Alan Tulloch is not a native of Whalsay but comes from Cullivoe in North Yell. He married a Whalsay girl and came to live at Brough in Whalsay, joining the crew of a Whalsay fishing boat (1978), he captains the 'Floris' in which Andrew Poleson's son George also has a share.

He is an enthusiastic fiddler, needing little encouragement to play for listeners. His musical tastes are reflected in his long-playing record collection which ranges widely over the fiddle repertory and includes American Country and Western, French Canadian, Scottish and Shetland fiddle music. In this his tastes exemplify the diversification of interest in music amongst the younger members of Shetland society.

He frequently plays with a large ad hoc band of Whalsay men and boys, which includes several accordions, melodeons, guitars, drums and piano, as well as the previously mentioned fiddle, Gilbert Hutchison (Gibbie o' Burns). The band plays for many dances held in Symbister Hall throughout the year. In spite of the varied musical instruments found in Whalsay (accordions and guitars being especially popular among the younger men) the fiddle is still preferred when Shetland reels are danced.

A.T. [When] me and Gibbie, we are playing at the weddings, we always play the Shetland reels together, and - the band just

takes a back seat and puts in a bit of [vamp]. Well they seem to like the Shetland reels here for the fiddle, I don't know why. (SA/1977/110)

At other times he is not too happy playing with accordions except when playing with an accordionist such as Magnus Leask who "minds the scales [keys] that are suitable for the fiddle". Despite the fact that few younger people in Whalsay are apparently attempting to learn the fiddle (and when this was written the itinerant fiddle teacher had not yet been able to include Whalsay in his itinerary), Alan Tulloch considers that the fiddle rates highly in the Affections of Whalsay people. However, as the following conversation suggests, his own style of playing of Shetland reels is not as highly valued as his playing of other material, possibly because his playing style is so different from that of native Whalsay fiddlers.

A.T. Well, I don't know, Peter. I would rather say that the fiddle is still the favourite. Because, I wasn't out last year at the New Year's Eve dance, and Gibbie wasn't; and Georgie and his wife was, and they said that the band was good but they missed the fiddles. And we played at a wedding recently in Whalsay, and there were some strangers people from Scalloway - oh different places. And he said he thought that the band was good because he could hear the fiddles in the background all the way. So I think young people today, they don't seem to get interested enough to learn it. But I don't know how many'll want me to - if you come in here around sometimes, mebbe second day of a wedding - "play this, play that". But not the Shetland reels that they want, it's this Country and Western, catchy things like that version of The Mason's Apron and all different sorts of things like that, all this country waltzes, something of this type. That seems to be the only way I can capture the [interest], well - being Whalsay it has to be something sort of unusual like. I mind one night in Whalsay I played a Scottish reel, Scottish march and Scottish strathspey - and I thought, at that time I knew I was playin' it much better than I play some of the Country and Western stuff. There were only one Scotchman that seemed to applaud for it - one of the incomers!

(SA/1977/110/2)

It is clear that Alan, as a fiddle player and as an incomer, feels somewhat apart from the other men of Whalsay. The reason for this may be more than a general lack of interest in fiddling compared with other instruments such as the accordion (which is very popular in

Whalsay and played to a very high standard by some men). His skilful playing of Country and Western music is probably preferred to his playing of Shetland reels simply because his style of reel playing is so unlike the traditional Whalsay style. However, he is conscious of the contrast between his adopted island and his island of birth, Yell, which he visited recently for a wedding and when he stayed at Moarfield in Cullivoe (home of Bobbie Jamieson a famous local fiddler) for a whole week making music with Cullivoe friends. Moarfield was for him 'a hoose of solid fiddling'. (SA/1977/109/4)

#### OUT SKERRIES.

These are a small group of inhabited islands further east of Whalsay. The people of Skerries are noted for their hospitality, for the energy of their dancing and for the fact that weddings there may still last for three days and nights. However, the population is small (93 in 1976 - Shetland in Statistics, No. 6, April 1977), which is probably why in recent decades, although there are two or three men there who play the fiddle, a distinct Skerries repertory has not survived. Indeed the people of Skerries frequently looked on the men of Whalsay to come across and provide the music at weddings. With a small population like that of Skerries on islands with an area of less than one square mile the attitude of the Kirk to fiddling could have a considerable influence on the fiddling tradition. Robert Irvine, the registrar in Whalsay, has recorded how a Whalsay fiddler, Thomas Arthur (fl. 1860s), was asked to go to Skerries to play for dancing, but on arrival there found he had left his instrument behind. At that time there was only one playable violin in Skerries. It belonged to the missionary/school teacher who, if he could play, probably played classical violin music; but he disapproved of dancing and refused to lend it. Arthur had to sail back to Whalsay again to get his own

fiddle. When this writer visited Skerries during 1971 there were two men, Andrew and Davy Anderson, who could play a small repertory of well-known reels. They regarded themselves as 'house fiddlers' and the Skerries folk still invited the Whalsay band across for any big dance. The playing style of these few fiddlers differed slightly from that of Whalsay, the tempo being somewhat faster and there was less use of open string harmonies. The style however was equally vigorous.

#### FETLAR

Though it is nearly twice the area of Whalsay, Fetlar, which lies some 15 miles further north, has a population of ninety-nine (1976), ten times smaller than that of Whalsay. This fact alone highlights the contrast (during this century) between a fishing and a crofting community for, while Fetlar is fertile and known as 'the garden of Shetland', it has no natural harbour and so can support no fishing community dependent these days on vessels too large to be safely hauled up open beaches. An abundance of Norse place names points perhaps to the slowness with which Fetlar adopted Scottish culture and two reels, apparently indigenous to Fetlar, bear Norse-sounding names - Winnyadepla and Hjogrovoltar. However, a third called Billiaclett (or Biljaclett) turns out to be a variant of the Scottish tune, Robbie Thompson's Smithy. All three are known to octogenarian, John Robertson, who played the fiddle for most island dances in earlier times. Though when he was a boy there was no Hall, major dances for weddings and other events were held in the school room and from the age of 14 he went to play there with an uncle:-

"We had two fiddles and we played the same. I was taught the tunes by him at least, listened to him playing and got them that say. And we played together and you would think it was only one violin." (SA/1974/14/13)





John Robertson of Fetlar (1970)



An ad hoc band for a wedding dance  
Baltasound, Unst, (1953)

Unlike some areas (Whalsay and North Yell for instance), pianos were available for use at dances from the early 1920s. John Robertson enjoys playing with a piano vamp more than an accordion because:-

"It got out the time better. Miss Carson and I used to go down to the Manse and she was damn good on the piano, you know, and it was really good, it eased me a lot you see."

(SA/1974/14/13)

John remembers playing as a 16 year old for dancing classes given by a mason, John Sinclair, from Lerwick. Sinclair introduced such dances as the Brittannia Waltz, Velita, Hesitation Waltz, Leathern Wheel Polka, Jacky Tar and the Barn Dance, otherwise the dance and tune repertory is rather small and changes only slowly. Sonny Bruce, formerly from Unst, remembers going to Fetlar as a teenage member of a band from Unst just after the end of World War II. He recalled his amusement and astonishment on an occasion when his own band were given a rest by the Fetlar musicians who then announced that the next dance would be the Fetlar Foxtrot.

"It was just after the war and the Foxtrot - the modern dances had just come to Unst for the reason that the R.A.F. were there [at Saxaford radar defence station] you see. Yell didn't have it, Fetlar didn't have it as far as we knew, neither did Whalsay. There were only Lerwick and Unst and places south of the Mainland. This was the tune and the old Shetland fiddler played it like this:- [see Ex. 1]... We'd been used to the R.A.F. band playing foxtrots - saxophones - everything, you know. Harold Sutherland, he looks at me and says "There's something not right about that!". And yet the folk on the hall floor were dancing some kind of dance and keeping time to it. And it was rather a smoochy dance, because the young couples were getting together you see. But how they could dance a foxtrot!.....And I only ever heard that tune once and I never forgot it!"

(SA/1977/115/7)

Obviously only the name and the grosser features of the dance had been incorporated into the local dance tradition: it had been thoroughly 'Fetlarised'.

This is the most northerly island in the British Isles and, with the possible exception of Foula and Fair Isle, the most isolated of the larger islands in former days. Yet, in spite of its location, its excellent natural harbour at Baltasund, made it popular as a base for cod and herring fishing and, in the case of the latter, second only in importance to Lerwick.

Jim Craigie, an Orkney man serving as a lighthouse keeper in Bressay, earlier spent four and a half years as a keeper on the Muckle Flugga, the lighthouse at the northern end of Unst. He compares Unst - for its fiddling tradition - very favourably with his native isles:-

"Where you get one or two good fiddlers in Orkney, you get one or two dozen fiddlers up here."

This view was endorsed by Bobbie Peterson:-

"Even in my young day, the best, the cream of the fiddlers was north in Unst, they reckoned"

and, according to Jim Craigie:-

"The further away [from the Scottish mainland] the longer the old way lasts."  
(SA/1977/120/6)

#### The Stickle family

Fredamond Stickle has already been mentioned in the description of as yule time dance at the laird's home in Unst (Ch.1). His grandson, John (1875-1957) was still playing when P.S.Shuldham-Shaw visited Unst in 1946 and again in the 1950s. Shuldham-Shaw gives an account of John Stickle in Journal of The English Folk Dance and Song Society (1962, p.129) and publishes a number a curious melodies known apparently only to John Stickle - curious because of their unusual phrase structures and rhythms. They are clearly a repertory of tunes that pre-dated the common Shetland reels and are comparable

with certain Norwegian structures.

GILBERT GRAY (b.1909)

Gibbie, as he is affectionately known, had too small a croft to be able to support him and consequently spent most of his life at sea. At the age of 14 he worked at inshore halibut fishing in fourereens - and when this fishing failed he joined the merchant service and travelled around the world. He lost his best fiddle when he was torpedoed while serving on The Highlander in World War II. On 'D' Day his vessel was blown up by a mine just outside Aberdeen. When war ended he worked for a time in salvage operations in England for five years before again trying his luck at fishing, this time for herring on board a seine-netter based on Burra Isle. After that he worked until 'retirement' at the R.A.F. camp in Unst as a gardener. He now fills some of his spare time fishing for lobsters around the entrance to Baltasund. He learned his fiddling from his father, who also played, and from his mother who was among the few Shetland women who played the fiddle. If for most of his working life he was away from Unst, he nevertheless seems to have preserved a distinct Unst style from his boyhood days. His father played with his fiddle held low on his left arm but in 'just the same' style as his son. This is probably not quite true for Gibbie tends to slur pairs of semiquavers together more than other Unst players. Unlike Gibbie, who was used to being accompanied by a piano (he has an old upright piano in his parlour) his father never played to accompaniments.

G.G. I mind him getting up to play at my cousin's wedding, that was me father's niece like, and he wasn't for goin' up, playin' at this hall you see, among all this fokk and that, he was getting an old man now. I said I'd come up with him, an' I got him up, an' the bride she was wantin' him to come up, to play at the wedding. So he went up, an' of course it was Shetland reels we're playin'. I went up with him an' of course there were a girl vampin' on the piana. He did admit 'at the harmony along wi' him was - a bit better. When he came just to study it up he thought it was all right, but he

wouldna give up the idea of what the fiddle was good enough on  
[its] self. (SA/1971/106/5)

Gibbie played for dancing in houses before the war with two or three fiddlers 'spieling one another' (taking it in turns) and whenever he was home on leave during the war he also played for dances in the local halls. He maintains that it was the improvement in furnishings that stopped dancing in the houses:-

G.G. If you're dancing on a piece of linoleum it ruined it for good. You couldna hev a dance now in the house wi' this coverin' and that put a stop to that lot - once they got the hooses modernised. (SA/1971/106/5)

His cousin also played the fiddle 'aff o' the notts' (from written music) but he could not play by ear.

G.G. I could sit an' play the same way, but I felt it was goin' to spoil my Shetland way of playing as I called it, an' so it would, right away. You can't get in that lilt. There's something that you can't get in if you play aff o' the notts - it seems to be too plain - some of those old Shetland tunes, you have to get in some kind of a lilt with them. (SA/1971/106/5)

Gilbert Gray is not alone in stressing the importance of learning orally as opposed to learning from notation. Many fiddlers share this view and maintain that reliance on notation inhibits both a sense of style and the ability "to make the tune your own", that is, to have your own personal version of a tune.

This view was put very clearly and forcefully by another fiddler, <sup>the late</sup> Sonny Bruce, who, though raised in Unst, became the postmaster in Scalloway in Mainland Shetland. Although he himself reads music and has learned a considerable part of the Scottish repertory, enjoying in particular the challenges posed by some of Scott Skinner's pieces, he is insistent on the primacy of the oral tradition and on the importance of the individual:-

"The real Shetland music, the Shetland versions of tunes... its your own idea of how the tune should be played. Now, you'll get somebody like [x.x.] that's coming along and saying 'Dat soonds no right, yon's no' how it's played, it's no written doon like that.' That's where they're wrong you see, that's where it loses all its [?] and that's what I'm telling Willie and wir Ian, 'Don't copy anybody, tak the tune and play un the way that you like to do it, and there's no such thing as 'thee being wrong and me being right.' Everybody has their own version. If there are two the same I'll guarantee that the one copied the other. There's absolutely no purpose in that whatsoever."

(SA/1977/115)

Possibly because pianos came early to the island (as in Fetlar) the fiddle performance style in Unst is less 'harmonic' than in other areas like Whalsay and Yell, for the use of vamped harmonies inhibits the fiddlers' use of open string chords and drones. Mrs. Sutherland of Uyeasound remembers piano and fiddle providing the dance music ever since she began dancing (around 1910).

During the winter of 1913-14 a dancing master, Ewan Clayton, came to teach dancing in both Baltasund and Uyeasound. He fiddled while demonstrating and introduced such dances as the Quadrilles and Lancers, the Scotch Reel, Reel of Eight, Winter Cotillon, Velita, Spanish Waltz and some Polkas and country dances. There were no dance bands as such in Unst until the NATO defence base was established there during the 1950s and, unlike Whalsay, there was no chief fiddler - there were so many who could play for dancing that they all 'took turn about'. Since the 1950s the R.A.F. band at Saxaford has been a kind of trend-setter and such dances as the fox-trot became familiar to younger people in the island. Yet in this case familiarity with 'foreign' styles did not result in wholesale adoption. In fact it may be that the 'threat' to the island's native tradition was the stimulus that lead to the formation of the Unst Fiddle Society in 1967 under the leadership of Ian Deerness and, since about 1970 under Samuel Poleson.

Several members of the society are also members of the Uyeasound band, an informal group of musicians living in the south of

the island who meet often for their own enjoyment as well as to play at weddings and concerts throughout the district.

Since the Shetland Isles Education Authority's introduction of fiddle teaching began a large number of youngsters have taken to the fiddle and a good deal of talent is displayed, notably by Stephen Spence, a 14 year-old son of John Spence, a descendant of the famous Stickle family. Stephen has already composed a number of Shetland reels and airs in what other Shetlanders consider to be a very 'Shetland' style.

YELL.

Laurence Williamson's account of fiddling (see Ch.1,p.27) must have been largely based on life in his native island of Yell. We get another glimpse of this life in the papers of Irvine of Midbreak (north Yell) which include three manuscript pages of fiddle music transcriptions by one J.D. Hoseason, headed "Shetland Tunes never before set to music, Dec. 1862" (see Appendix 7). One of the tunes, Miss Spences' Reel, has the following note:-

"Composed by John Anderson, voe, and played by him in the late Mr. Neven of Windhouse's family at Reafirth at a Christmas party, the majority of Ladies, Miss Spences, and the Reel got their name."

Windhouse is a large ruined residence whose stone walls stand out starkly above the road a few miles from Laurence Williamson's home in Mid Yell. Hoseason's notations and remarks suggest that even in the homes of these very few wealthy families living in Yell, the 19th-century repertory and social customs were much the same as those of their poorer neighbours, in the Shetland reels and jig type tunes were common to both.



But this account should not be allowed to distort one's view of life in Yell. It has always seen more poverty than other islands. Though it is the second largest island in Shetland, Yell has a population barely equal to that of Whalsay (one-tenth the size of Yell). Much of Yell is a huge peat moor with little townships scattered around its edges and at the sides of voes, e.g. Burravoe, West Yell, Gossabrough, and in the north, Cullivoe. Each of these townships preserved a fairly independent social existence until the last 20 years when the village of Mid Yell became increasingly a centre for social life by virtue of its being the location for a Secondary school and for one or two industrial projects, e.g. a shell fish factory.

The north end of the island, comprising Gutcher, Cullivoe and, in the extreme north west, the tiny hamlet of Gloup, still preserves a considerable degree of independent social life which is reflected in the playing style of fiddlers in the area. Though many of the communities in Yell would repay close study in terms of their music-making, I chose for a variety of reasons to concentrate my research on North Yell and on the social and musical life of Cullivoe. Its independence and the extent of its ability to make its own entertainment is reflected in the results of a survey made for me in 1978 by a native of Cullivoe, Daniel Jamieson, of the 70 men aged 16 or over belonging to the district. Twenty-one were found to play or have played the fiddle to various degrees of expertise, another 5 the melodeon or accordion; 4 others played guitars, while 8 were known as 'singers'. One other made up poetry and another, the late Tom Tulloch of Gutcher, had a reputation as a fine historian and story teller. Clearly a great deal of instrumental music-making took place as part of domestic entertainment, though the number of men performing at public concerts and dances is comparatively small.



Gilbert Gray (1971)



Unst Fiddle Society (1957)

Two other men who died that same year deserve special mention for their role as fiddlers in the community. Bobbie Jamieson of Moarfield, Cullivoe, was born in 1892. He began learning the fiddle by ear from an older local man, Bruce Danielson, when he was 8. He played for his first dances when 16-17 years old. At first all dancing was done in houses but, shortly before 1910, a building which stands below Moarfield, formerly built as the Free Kirk, was converted for use as a community hall and Bobbie became one of the principal 'Hall fiddlers' for the next 20 years. During the 1930s the melodeon with piano and other younger fiddlers provided the music for dances and Bobbie became more an organiser, for weddings and such events, than a player. At some time he learned to read music and played in the Kirk band which consisted of fiddles and viola. Although he had retired from playing for dancing, he remained an active fiddler until his death. After World War II he became the bandmaster of a band of traditional fiddlers in Cullivoe which was revived again for several years in the 1970s with younger men modelling their playing of Shetland reels on the style of Bobbie Jamieson and Willie Barclay Henderson of Gloup, his life-long friend and companion fiddler at countless Hall dances.

Willie B. Henderson of Gloup was born in 1900.

W.H. I started to play on the fiddle when I was about five year old but I had no fiddle. I had to mak the - me own fiddle oot of a Fry's chocolate box..... I didn't learn to play on that at all but it learned me a bow haund, you see. I would sing the - sing the tune and play it at the same time - but it developed me bow haund you see. And er ..... me name- faither cam home from Edinbury and - Willy Barclay Moar - and he cam home fae Edinbury, and he was beside us and he asked us, me father and mother, what I was interested in. And they said "Well he's a horrid fellow for working wi' the fiddle." "And what did he - did he hae a fiddle?" "No, no, he didn't hae no fiddle." So I was blate, d'you keen, I was shy - and I was away oot o' the rodd. So they got me to show him this fiddle that was made oot o' a chocolate box. He was just square at the ends you keen, and he laughed, oh, he laughed to see it. And I had terrem for the strings, that's

sheep's gut spun on a wheel, and snödit, and then reeled on a reel and dried at the fire. And it made wonderful strings - you would'na believe what you could get out o' that. An - he said he would send me a fiddle. And he sent me a fiddle an - but she was a small fiddle, half-sized fiddle. But somehow or another I never could make a job of playing that fiddle right. But me brother, the older brother, he learned to play on it. And then he bought a big fiddle. And I wasn't long learning on that big fiddle.

(SA/1971/59:field worker Margaret Mackay)

While he was still very young his mother died and he stopped playing for three years until the same Bruce Danielson met him:-

W.H. And he says "I've been told that you er - left playing the fiddle - I'm heard you playing at the Hall".... and he says "I'm thought a lot o' your playing" he says, "I think you'll tak your fiddle and come down ta me" he says, "There's nobody coming to me". And I went down, I could jest play a part - the first tune that I learned. And I was two year wi' him, and he learned me all about the Shetland reels.

(SA/1971/59)

During World War I when the older men (including Bobbie Jamieson) were away, he began playing for dancing in the Hall and elsewhere. Mostly the repertory was Shetland reels, though while he was still at school he had played for the local schoolteacher at daily dancing classes in the school when she introduced Highland dances and the Quadrilles, the Lancers and other dances new to the community. Dancing was clearly popular, especially during the winter.

W.H. But they were fairly going at the Public Hall you know at Christmas time, they were fairly going at this - Shetland reels. And - they started at six o'clock at night, and they danced till seven in the morning. And it was playing Shetland reels - you would play maybe about twenty Shetland reels and then you had a Highland Schottische. But there were so many men, connected wi' the fishing you see.... you hed to ask anybody that was dancing, you hed to ask him for his place when he was finished dancing afore you could get a chance to get up.

(SA/1971/59)

It was hard work playing for such enthusiastic dancers:-

W.H. I mind me playing one night during the war, the 1918 war. I played the whole night from nine o'clock at night until seven in the morning. And you know, I never was so tired in me life. I absolutely slept on the rodd going home and I would

go aff o' the rodd and then I would waken up, you see, or go into this ditch, then I would waken up and travel a piece again. That was a fact, and I went to bed and I sleepit and got up at the second day about the morning. Never knew nothing, and I was right dead tired.

P.C. Where was this? W.H. That was home beside meself.

P.C. In Gloup? W.H. Yes

P.C. But where did you play?

W.H. I played in this hall, me brother Simpson - he was to play too, but he played at the first of the dance and then he went to see a friend and he never cam back more. [Laughs] And Bobbie was away at the war you see.

(SA/1970/263)

Communities like Cullivoe were not always so isolated and self-contained. During the decade or two before World War II, with the herring industry at its height and a large shore station at Cullivoe, Bruce Danielson and others had ample opportunity to mix with immigrants from other parts of Shetland and Scotland. At such times musicians became aware of differing styles. Willie Henderson said of Bruce Danielson:-

W.H. That man could play the whole night, Shetland reels, and he could play the way 'at they played em in Lunnasting, the way 'at they played them in Whalsay, the way 'at they played them in Walls, the way't they played them in Unst, the way't they played them [in] Skerries. You see there were a big fishing in Cullivoe and he was going through the barrels and he was picking them aff o' this - [at] least the huts, and he was picking them aff o' these fellows wi' a bad night when they were ashore and haein dancing in the huts and he was pickin' these tunes aff o' them. (SA/1971/59)

Willy Barclay Henderson was one of many who left North Yell to work elsewhere. In his case he spent some time at a fishing station in Lerwick and recalls his surprise at being paid for playing on one occasion at an end-of-season 'Foy':-

W.H. Two pound sixteen. Well I didn't - it wasn't [expected] - the hat was put around you see and I'd played the whole night and - he was a Russian, Bulkov, and his wife and daughter and son was there - and - he put them up a platform - sent for wood ta Hay and Co., and they laid the platform out afore the door so that his wife could see..... them dancing. And I played the

Square dances, but no Shetland reels you see. It was all Scotch and Square dances..... It was Scotch lasses, there were no Shetland lasses there.

P.C. Where was this then?

W.H. At Grimister, in Lerwick. And - the other morning the foreman cam down and said "I want you up". And I went up wi' him, and he give me this money. I never was so shocked in me life. I said "I'm taking nothing." He says "Your takings, it's yours" he says, "They passed around the hat after you were finished and" he says, "that's what I got, so" he says, "you're taking it all."

P.C. How many lasses was that?

W.H. Well there were forty-eight crews of three .... women, a packer and two gutters, he had forty-eight. And thirty-eight coopers. (SA/1970/276/3)

As Hall fiddlers until the 1930s Willy Barclay Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson must have played together for countless hours and developed virtually identical economical styles of playing. They frequently used what was called the high bass tuning (i.e. with low G tuned up a tone to A), which enabled them to use 'the long draa on the back string' - introduced into pieces in A and D as an occasional drone. This enriched the texture of their playing.

W.H. I think the reason that theym usin the high bass - that they hed nobody then in those days to accompany..... they played their own accompaniments as they played the tune. (SA/1970/266)

They even indulged in some simple harmonisation of each other while playing reels at breakneck speed, "To give a better flavour".

Being a Hall fiddler required a stamina and dedication that caused few men to undertake the role for long. Many able fiddlers in any case were not at home long enough or regularly enough. Another able musician, 'old Nicky' Tulloch of Cullivoe, spent much of his active life at sea. With so many fiddle players around in the 1940s Mary Moar became a regular player on her melodeon for Hall dances. As Ian Anderson (now in his late 40s) explained:-



I.A. When I was a nipper there was far more people that could play the fiddle. Another thing was that there were nothing like a band hired or anything like that, even Regatta dances like that, the biggest eens that was. I mean they just acksed eens around the place that was used to playing, to tak the fiddle. That was all that was till it. I mean there were 's many as - five or six fiddles at the Hall and they -

D.J. All played together?

I.A. Well they would probably start off playing together, then they would split up, but I mean - there were men fae Sooth Yell and any other place and anybody that you kent would play the fiddle, they would just - somebody play for a while and then lay it doon. And whoever was M.C. would go and ax somebody else..... It was very seldom that you had anybody refuse, I mean, even if they only gōd up and played twa-three tunes.

(SA/1978/xxx; fieldworker Daniel Jamieson)

This sort of arrangement worked well providing there were always enough that were prepared to take turn and turn about. But in the 1960s a different practice evolved. 'The band', consisting of three fiddles, two 'vamping women' on accordions or melodeons, a pianist and guitarist, would play until midnight. The master of ceremonies then asked others to play for a couple of hours, but thereafter the task devolved on three enthusiastic youngsters who played until 6 a.m. Later these three (two of them grandchildren of Bobbie Jamieson) joined the band but soon found they would be deserted by others and left to provide music for virtually the whole night. These three, now known as the Cullivoe Band (accordion, bass guitar and piano) play for most local events and take other engagements around Shetland. They are able to charge a fee but do not do so for local weddings (when "everyone contributes" something).

Cullivoe still has plenty of fiddlers - they only occasionally bring their fiddles along to dances to "spell" the dance band, but use them more for "having a tune" with their friends in the houses. As elsewhere in Shetland, the fiddle has lost its place as the leading dance music instrument, though much of its repertory is still dance music. Attitudes to non-dance music (e.g. slow airs in





Bobbie Jamieson (of Moarfieid) with Willie Barclay Henderson  
(of Gloup), 'hall fiddlers' (c.1963)



Cullivoe Traditional Fiddle Band  
during a visit to Edinburgh (1972).

the Scottish style) vary. For many younger fiddlers in Shetland the slow air is a challenge that introduces a new aesthetic, where legato phrasing, beauty of tone (including controlled use of vibrato) are important. In Cullivoe, however, and other conservative areas little interest is shown in them. As John, the son of Willie Henderson, put it:-

"Slow airs? Nobody plays slow airs around here; that's for funerals." (SA/1980/13)

This point will be discussed later when the aesthetics of fiddle playing are examined.

## CONCLUSION

This compilation of fiddlers' biographies is necessarily incomplete. Whole communities remain unsurveyed, in particular those of Fair Isle, Foula and Papa Stour, three of the most inaccessible island communities, and other places such as the prosperous and industrious fishing community of Burra Isle. Tentative enquiries suggest that each has its own story to tell. Fair Isle, however, has had its small population (76 in 1976) considerably diluted by incomers and, in the case of the much smaller island populations of Foula (36) and Papa Stour (38) any fiddling tradition has depended very much on one or two individual fiddler families. Each of these islands has, to some extent, its own small repertory of indigenous tunes. Andy Gear, a native of Foula, now teaching at Mid Yell School, has recorded for me a number of tunes from his father's playing (see below) and George P. S. Peterson, another schoolmaster who teaches at Brae in North Mainland, has preserved in his own playing a number of tunes peculiar to his native island of Papa Stour as well as a performer's knowledge of the famous Papa Stour sword dance which he teaches to a team of young dancers from Brae School. Papa Stour's population is now too

small, it seems, to maintain a distinctive musical culture of its own and George Peterson is almost certainly the main exponent of the musical and story-telling traditions of that island.

But despite the incompleteness of this account one can now provide answers to some of the questions posed in the preface. Who are the fiddlers who maintain this extraordinarily lively tradition in these northern isles? The answer is the ordinary menfolk of Shetland - crofters, fishermen, seamen - as and whenever required. In the past most men have attempted to play the instrument and most have succeeded. There is no special 'caste' of musicians, though some of the most strongly motivated and most talented have acquired a rather special standing as concert fiddlers or as members of semi-professional dance bands. Even the latter group will often play for no reward especially within their own community for special celebrations like weddings. For many of them their reward is the feeling that they can contribute to the quality of life in their community (or in the case of the house fiddlers, who are found at the other end of the fiddler continuum, enrich the leisure hours of their friends and families in their own homes). Other questions such as when and where the fiddlers make their music has also been answered during the course of this chapter in the lively accounts of a number of fiddlers. Now we shall examine the question 'What do they play?'.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FIDDLERS' REPERTORY.

Shetlanders use a fairly small number of terms with which to classify in part their indigenous repertory. This they add to the general terminology used for pan-British dance-music genres. The terms 'spring' and 'reel' have already been mentioned. They are inter-changeable and are applied to duple-time tunes used for dancing Shetland reels and any similar type of dance, for example, the Scottish eightsome and foursome reels. Both these latter dances were known in Shetland as 'Scotch reels' (see, for instance, p.18) though the foursome reel does not seem to have been danced much by Shetlanders but more by the Scots lasses and others visiting the islands. The term 'spring' would seem to be the older Shetland name and is probably of Scandinavian origin, though it is also found in the old Scots dialect. During the 1970s it was rarely used by any other than older fiddlers such as Andrew Poleson, who often described his favourite tunes as 'fine dancing springs' and some of the rarer ones as 'aald springs'.

Another pair of terms used interchangeably are 'Muckle reel' and 'Auld reel'. Two examples were published in *Da Mirrie Dancers* (Shetland Folk Society, Lerwick 1970), namely The Muckle Reel O' Finnigirth and The Aald Reel O' Whalsay. They are the music for an older type of dance, now obsolete. There are few of them and they form no part of any fiddler's active (as opposed to passive) repertory.

Da Mirrie Dancers also contains a number of tunes described as 'Trowie tunes' (trows = fairies) which refer usually to their supposed origin. Some are reels, others are in jig time, but the term 'jig' seems to have been rarely used for some twenty or more Shetland tunes in jig time. Two other categories of tune whose labels refer to their supposed origin are the 'Greenland' or 'whaling' tunes and 'Yakki' tunes. The latter no longer survive but the name 'Yakki' was apparently given to tunes supposed to have been learned from Eskimos (most probably in the Hudson Bay area) by Shetland and Orkney whaling men. One other category, 'wedding tune', is found in the Folk Society's collection and refers to any tune associated with the wedding ritual of earlier times. Bridal marches are an example and will be discussed further below.

As has already been said and, as one might expect, such labels do not embrace the whole repertory, nor do they divide it up in any consistent manner. The Shetland Folk Society collection includes only what the authors considered to be indigenous tunes whereas the repertory of most fiddlers today contains much else. I will discuss their repertory, dividing it for convenience into two categories:- dance music and 'listening' music. This should not be taken to imply that dancers don't listen to music played for them, nor that dance tunes are not commonly played as listening pieces whenever fiddlers meet or entertain their friends and family. In any case, some of the tunes now classed as 'listening' pieces are possibly descendants of dance tunes whose dances are long forgotten and this is particularly true of the music in jig-time.

In all cases the terms 'tune', 'piece', 'spring', etc. refer to a piece of music which is identifiable and namable by Shetlanders, it

being sufficiently different from others to be recognised as such. There is no tradition of improvisation in Shetland but, because the tradition is essentially oral and because there is no habit of strict teaching (unlike for instance, the Scottish pibroch repertory for the highland bagpipe), each fiddler has his or her own version of a tune which will differ to a greater or lesser degree from other versions. Such differences evolved as the tune was learned and its form became set through habit so that the basic features of any fiddler's version do not vary much whatever the context of the performance. Each player, however, is aware of the differences between his version and those of others and during the many informal evenings of music making there is a good deal of interest shown in each other's versions - for on such occasions each player is usually invited to play a tune on his or her own and the performance is enjoyed as much for the individuality of the version as for anything else. When players perform together informally only a minimal attempt is made to alter one's own version to match that of others. This situation is now changing as more and more of the Shetland repertory is appearing in printed collections and since the advent of cassette recorders, but in spite of this there is some resistance to the acceptance of one standard version of a tune. When any of the music transcriptions are consulted then, it should be remembered that they are mostly field recordings and that each transcription represents one musician's version of a tune as it was performed on one particular occasion.

Figure 1 shows the fiddlers' dance music repertory arranged primarily according to rhythmic structure. It shows in one column an estimate of the size of the repertory and in another gives the dances with which they are nowadays associated. No such table could ever be complete, for any enterprising fiddler might attempt almost any new

FIG 1.

SHETLAND FIDDLE REPERTORYTYPOLOGY OF DANCE TUNES

AALD REELS	Muckle reels .....	5	.....	Obsolete since
	Da guisers' reel .....	1	.....	World War 1
	(west Mainland and Papa Stour)			
	Papa Stour sword dance .....	1	.....	Danced by one team only
	SHETLAND REELS 1. Traditional a. asymmetrical	7+	.....	obsolete
	b. common .....	173+		Shetland reels
	2. Shetland variants of reels, hornpipes and strathspeys from Scotland, Ireland etc. ....			8-some reels barn dances country dances dashing white sergeant, quadrilles
	3. Modern .....			
	4. Foreign reels and hornpipes .....			
	JIG TIME TUNES			
JIG TIME TUNES	Shetland traditional			Shaalds of Foola
	modern			Quadrilles
	Scottish, Irish etc.			Boston 2 steps
MARCH TIME TUNES	Shetland			
	Bride's marches .....			Not danced
	Modern			Boston 2-step
MARCH TIME TUNES	Other			Gay Gordons
				Lancers
				Military 2-step
POLKAS	Shetland			
	Traditional			Polkas
	modern			
POLKAS	British			
	Scandinavian			
WALTZES	Scottish			
	British Old-Time			
	Norwegian			
WALTZES	Modern Shetland			
OTHER	Foxtrots, Quicksteps, Novelties			
	Strathspeys			Schottisches (obsolescent)



dance tune on his fiddle. For example, the 'Fetlar Foxtrot' has already been cited. No doubt other modern tunes have been played and one might easily imagine fiddlers attempting such novelties as the 'slosh', though, on the whole, most modern dances are associated with popular dance-band ensembles in which the fiddle's role is now secondary to that of the accordion.

I will discuss the distinctive features of each of the indigenous dance-music categories before proceeding<sup>e</sup> to survey the much smaller 'listening' tune repertory.

#### MUCKLE, OR AALD REELS

What little is known of the dancing of these reels is documented by J.F. and T.M. Flett who include some simple transcriptions of five examples (3 tunes for the Aald Reel of Papa Stour, The Aald Reel of Whalsay and a fragment of an Aald Reel of Walls). Da Mirrie Dancers (Lerwick, 1970) includes another transcription of The Aald Reel of Whalsay (from the playing of the same John Irvine) as well as a version of The Muckle Reel O' Finnigirt. The dancing of these reels died out during World War I and the only two fiddlers who include such tunes in their active repertory are Dr. Tom Anderson and George Peterson, both of whom are noted for their folkloric interests.

The structure is very different from that of the common Shetland reel. They were associated with dances where continuous reeling has been the dominant feature. Consequently there is no need for the balanced bipartite structure that corresponds with the two halves of the Shetland reel with its alternation between stepping and

reeling sections. Fraser Hughson, a native of Papa Stour who was recorded by Tom Anderson in the 1950s when he was over 80 years old, said of it:-

"Well, he [the Muckle Reel of Papa] just began and never ended, just one thing all the time... just keepit reeling all the time, bumping and carrying on."

(SA/1959/91)

The Fletts remarked on how, by the early part of this century, the Aald Reels were generally performed only at special points in the wedding feast, usually for the ritual of the Bride's Reels. Now seventy years later, the ordinary Shetland reel - which is falling into disuse - occupies the same place at weddings as that once held by the Aald reels. In both instances just before their demise the oldest dances in the community have come to occupy a place of ritual importance, being cherished for their age and as symbols of Shetland culture.

Nowadays fiddlers regard the musical phrasing of Aald Reels as lacking in sense. John Irvine (born 1882) frequently had to play the Aald Reel of Whalsay as the chief fiddler at Whalsay weddings but:-

"I just detested playing it, it were naethin' but a load o' trash. There were naethin' in it ava'.

(SA/1959/91; fieldworker, Tom Anderson)

This can probably be construed as more a musical judgement than a social one, for it was during the dancing of the Muckle Reel in his young days that the hat was passed around for the 'fiddler's money'!



The surviving reels share the following distinctive characteristics:- sharply pointed and strongly accented rhythmic patterns, accents often being achieved by using the bow strongly

enough to sound two or three strings simultaneously; short phrases repeated three or four times, each phrase based almost entirely on one triad or two alternating triads. The tonality of all extant Muckle Reels is based on D but containing unexpectedly abrupt changes of tonality, for example when D triads alternate with C triads. Many Shetlanders say that such pieces have no tune and I have already suggested (when discussing the 18th century account from Unst concerning the dancing and singing of Norn visicks) that these instrumental reels could have been the survival of rhythmic and harmonic accompaniments to such singing. Such a survival spanning nearly two centuries is a pointer to the tenacity of Shetlanders for their traditional music, for, according to Low's informant, the older sung reel had already, in 1774, "almost given entire way to the [Scottish] reel" (Low, 1879, p. 163). On the other hand, these tunes may be remnants of an instrumental genre which was enjoyed but not reported for centuries before 1900. If one compares them with the Norwegian 'halling', the similarity between the two is striking. Examples 2, 3, 4 and 5 are of Muckle Reels. Example 6 is a fragment of a halling. Hallings belong to the oldest repertory of duple-time dance tunes in the Hardanger fiddle tradition of western Norway. Of such dances Reidar Sevg̃ writes:-

"Hardanger fiddle tunes are based on the repetition and variation of small, usually two-bar motifs.... In the duple-time dances the borderline between 6/8 and 2/4 is sometimes difficult to determine..... One purpose of the many different drone patterns in Hardanger fiddle playing is to enable drone effects based on the 1st, 5th (and occasionally even the 3rd) degrees of the scale to be used..... However, all four open strings are frequently used as variable drones below and above the melody.

(The New Grove Dictionary, v.xiii, p.327)

If, when one examines the music of the Aald Reels, one remembers that these are the last remnants of an earlier tradition and that the use of variable drones is a diminishing practice, one can

deduce (from the sudden shifts of pitch and the amount of string crossing involved, as well as the frequent use of chords) that the use of variable drone effects must also have been a feature of these Shetland tunes in earlier days. Sevåg's reference to 6/8 and 2/4 time is interesting for one meets just the same problem when attempting to transcribe many Shetland tunes, especially the Aald Reels. The transcription of the Muckle Reel of Finnigirth in Da Mirrie Dancers gives many half bars as three triplet quavers  whereas I have preferred to write  - a solution favoured also by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw who notated the tune from the playing of Peter Fraser in 1947 (P. Shuldham-Shaw MS, School of Scottish Studies archives). Ex. 4 gives a **machine** transcription of a relevant bar showing the precise timing but no sufficiently accurate standard notation is available. This problem of the borderline between 2/4 and 6/8 is discussed later in connection with 'jig-time' tunes.

One other item, not classed as a Muckle Reel but having the same features, is the Guisers' Reel as played by Peter Fraser in Walls and by two Papa Stour fiddlers, Fraser Hughson and John Fraser. It was played at weddings for the dancing of the guisers - a group of uninvited masked men who paid a brief visit to the wedding dance.

The few remaining Muckle Reels, together with the music of the Papa Stour Sword Dance and the Guisers' Reel are striking evidence of the persistence of Scandinavian stylistic traits in the music of the Shetland Isles. But their music is so different from that of the rest of the repertory it seems unlikely that they will be revived. Rather, those fiddlers who attempt in their playing to emphasise Shetland's historic Scandinavian connections do so by selecting pieces from elsewhere in the Shetland repertory (bridal marches, for instance)

modifying the tuning of the fiddle and indulging in extensive use of chording and variable drones.

#### PAPA STOUR SWORD DANCE

The history of the dance is discussed in detail by A.W. Johnston in The Sword Dance of Papa Stour, Shetland: a Surviving Norse Drama (Johnson and Greig, 1926). A small number of determined men have ensured its survival through the last 100 years. Papa Stour had its own team of dancers performing throughout the 19th century up until 1892 when it became dormant. Latterly the fiddler for the dance had been one, John Umphray (d.1907), an incomer to the island from Lunnasting on the mainland. The dance was revived in 1922 and a team of Papa dancers continued to keep it alive until 1968-9. The present teacher of the dance and fiddler for it, George Peterson, had joined the team as a dancer in 1950 and, though spending much of his working time away from the island, he continued to take an active part in the team until 1965. Though performances of the dance by an island team ceased c.1968-9, George Peterson taught the dance to a team of boys at Brae School on the Mainland where he taught, and it is this team which functions today under George Peterson's direction.

As a fiddler, Mr. Peterson provides the necessary music, which consists of two items. The first, called The Trip, is a short snatch of melody played as each of the seven dancers - the Seven Champions of Christendom - is introduced in turn to the audience by the leader (St. George), reciting the traditional text (which was recorded in full by S.Hibbert in 1822). The second piece is for the dance proper (Ex. 7). It should perhaps be classed as a Muckle Reel, so similar is its structure and its function, for it is repeated continuously for as

long as the dancers are 'running' the dance. Great use is made in this piece of what Shetlanders call 'the shivers', i.e. the rapid reiteration of a note or chord to strengthen the accent and enliven the general effect.

## REELS

It has already been remarked that Scottish type reels with their generally binary and isometric forms were becoming popular in Shetland during the 18th century. As the fashion for these new reels gained ground, two creative processes occurred. One was the adoption and 'Shetlandising' of Scottish tunes, many of which are still popular. Some of these have lost their original names, others are barely recognisable as being of Scottish derivation but other yet more popular tunes have preserved both their titles and identity. They will be discussed later. The other process was, of course, the composition of new tunes to fit the new dance. The archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain approximately 140 Shetland reels (see Appendix 3), not counting modern compositions (appearing since World War II), which will be discussed separately. No doubt some of these traditional 'Shetland' reels will yet turn out to be more Shetland variants of Scottish or Irish tunes.

### 1. TRADITIONAL SHETLAND REELS

(a) ASSYMETRICAL REELS. A small number of these tunes I have labelled in Figure 1 'assymetrical' because their phrase structure does not consist of multiples of two bars (making up 8 bars per section). Shetlanders have no special term for these tunes, which, probably because of their assymetry, are no longer danced, but

a small number were still in the repertory of several fiddlers, especially those from the island of Whalsay. John Irvine remarked once to Tom Anderson how he often counted beats on his fingers and found some of his reels were composed of three- plus five-beat phrases, but that the complete turning usually worked out to 8 (SA/1959/91). In most cases, such assymetry is confined to one turning only and in Whalsay this is usually the first turning when dancers would be reeling a figure-of-eight before returning to their lines to step-dance the second turning.

Andrew Poleson, somewhat younger than John Irvine, recorded several of such reels: for two of them he could remember no name (ex. 8 and 9). The first shows irregularity in both turnings whereas the second half of Ex. 9 is more typical of second turnings of many Whalsay reels. On one occasion (SA/1972/97/14) he named this piece Da Foreheid of the Sixtereen - a typically picturesque Shetland title suggested possibly by the lively upward leaps in the first section paralleling the motion experienced in the bows of a small boat in the confused seas that are often found around Shetland.

Two other examples of this class of reel are the Fetlar tune, Hjogrovltar (ex. 10) which was still used for dancing in Fetlar in the 1970s and a tune from Cullivoe which contains phrases resembling parts of Hjogrovltar.

The name of the Cullivoe tune - Millie Goodger (Ex. 11) - has provoked some discussion among Cullivoe fiddlers some of whom think it is a corruption of 'the Mill of Gutchter', the neighbouring township to Cullivoe. It is occasionally played in Cullivoe as a curiosity but not for dancing.



Virtually nothing is known of the history of these assymetrical tunes. One can only conjecture that they must represent some half-way stage between the Aald Reels and the common Shetland reels and that in the days when the tunes were better known, dancers would have had no problem dancing to them. One last example, called the Cross Reel or Cross Rig (in Whalsay Andrew Poleson called it General Howe), presents an additional problem for it is obviously a cousin to a strathspey reel published in N. Gow's First Repository (pt. 1, 2nd edition), as well as in numerous other collections published from 1775 onwards under the title The Lasses of Stewarton (Stewington, Stewingtoun). The Scottish tune has four sections each of four bars repeated and presumably fits the country dance of the same name (first published in Campbell's 9th Book of New and Favourite Country Dances and Strathspey Reels [c.1794]). The Shetland variants are shown in Ex.12 and it is likely that they are derived from the Scottish tune but that fiddlers and dancers modified it in early days so that it fitted their preferences for assymetrical structures. The tune was danced in Whalsay during this century, where I was told that to perform it they had to do a 'double dancing turn' (i.e. dance for twice as long).

(b) COMMON SHETLAND REELS. These are by far the largest class of Shetland music and the sound archives of the School of Scottish Studies contain over 160 such tunes if one counts the more recent compositions also. The number could be considerably increased were one to add also tunes in manuscript and those in recently published collections.

They share the same overall structure as common Scottish and Irish reels, being in regular binary form with 8 or 16 beats to each

half or turning (each turning is usually repeated).

The earliest notations of Shetland reels are to be found in a collection of papers compiled by J.T. Irvine of Midbreak, Yell. Among them are three sheets of music paper containing 14 tunes. One sheet contains two tunes that are not reels - Garster's Dream and The Day Daywen - and is signed by J.T. Hoseason and subtitled 'Shetland Tunes never before set to music - December 1862'. The other two sheets, written consecutively and dated February 1863, contain a number of tunes that are clearly reels, others are similar to Aald Reels and other reel-time tunes are given Shetland titles but are clearly variants of Scottish reels and strathspeys (see Appendix 2). Some of the assumedly indigenous tunes show Hoseason attempting to grapple with the problem of notating music that is neither clearly in 2/4 nor 6/8 time but something in between.

An interesting example is Da Shaalds O' Foula (Ex. 13), also called Da Foula Reel. It is still popular today and is occasionally still danced but as a country dance, not as a Shetland reel. An earlier version of this tune appears in Hibbert (1822) but in the key of G and in 6/8 time throughout. Hibbert also gives words associated with the tune. Today the tune is often played as in Hibbert and appears in that manner in Da Mirrie Dancers. However, in the district known as The Herra in Yell it is still played by members of the Robertson family in the key of A and with the A-E-A-E tuning. One Herra fiddler, Laury Davy Robertson (in his 70s), plays it halfway between a reel and a jig (though P. Shuldham-Shaw, who noted it down from him in 1947, wrote it unambiguously in 6/8 time). His son, Lell, plays it slightly quicker but more clearly in reel time. The father is, understandably, more aware of the difference than the son. In the

Herra three tunes were traditionally used for this dance, the other two following on, and, judging by today's evidence, were in reel time. The second of the three, called Tilly Plump, is a Shetland variant of a Scottish strathspey (Anthony Murray's Reel, in McGlashan [c.1780] p. 15). Elsewhere in Shetland, Shulldham-Shaw collected both reel-time and jig-time variants of this tune. In addition to the words printed by Hibbert, a well-known Shetland song, Boanie Tammie Scollay, is sung to essentially the same tune and it is occasionally played by fiddlers under that name as a reel.

What is one to make of such confusion? Two explanations are possible. Firstly, that it is common practice for dance band musicians to make metrical changes to tunes so that they can be used for different dances: so reel time tunes are readily converted into jig time and vice versa. The second is that in earlier days the rhythm of the Shetland reel was something more akin to compound-duple (jig) time but that there has been a gradual change (possibly owing to the increased contact with Scottish and Irish music) with the Shetland reel coming to be danced in modern reel time while other dances get performed in jig time. The differences between the performances of the Robertsons illustrate such change occurring between one generation and the next. The second hypothesis seems the more acceptable and, if it were true, it would be another pointer to stylistic similarities within western Norway<sup>(see Sevåg)</sup>. I have already argued this hypothesis in "The Fiddle in Shetland Society" (Cooke, 1978, p.77-78) using in addition to this tune another piece from Hoseason's manuscript, there entitled Whalsay, but commonly known today as Da Boanie Isle O' Whalsay.

More typical of the indigenous Shetland reel, however, are The Galley Watch (Ex. 14) and Aandowin at da Bow (Ex. 15). The first

turning of Da Galley Watch contains typical triadic motifs used in alternation while the second tune illustrates well the pentatonic nature of many Shetland tunes and the economic use of musical ideas. Further discussion of musical style of Shetland reels will be left until the entire indigenous repertory <sup>has been</sup> ~~is~~ discussed (see Chapter 4).

2. MODERN SHETLAND REELS. Though the Shetland reel as a dance has long been in a state of obsolescence in most parts of Shetland, the playing of Shetland reels is not, neither is the composing of new reels. The archives of the School of Scottish Studies contains 52 titles of newly composed tunes. This must represent but a small fraction of the tunes that have been composed during the last 20 years and the number increases week by week. Many find an immediate use by Scottish dance bands and become popular far outside the islands themselves. The last section of Da Mirrie Dancers is given over to modern Shetland compositions, including 14 reels by composers such as Tom Anderson, Frank Jamieson, Willie Hunter and Ronnie Cooper. The last named, an accordionist and piano accompanist, has published several volumes of his own music. Though not a fiddler himself, many of his tunes such as Da Tushkar, Miss Susan Cooper, Old Willie Hunter and Calum Donaldson are extremely popular among fiddlers and with Scottish dance bands. Leveneep Head, one of Frank Jamieson's reels, is a good example of the 'modern' Shetland reel (a term used by fiddlers themselves) (Ex. 16). The melodies span the first position on all four strings, including well accented use of the G string. The triadic passage work is still present but spreads itself more too, in contrast to the compressed (in range) and repetitive passage work of older reels. The tunes tend also to be more thoroughly diatonic than earlier tunes in which generally pentatonic patterns predominate. Some of them also modulate briefly into closely related keys. Though

many of these newer reels resemble their Scottish brethren, there is nevertheless, as one fiddler put it, 'a Shetland dialect' to them which is more readily perceivable in performance than on paper.

### 3. SHETLAND VARIANTS OF SCOTTISH AND IRISH TUNES.

David Johnson in his survey of 18th century Scottish music and society (Johnson, 1972) has commented on the passion of the Lowland Scot for dancing and for dance music, and the vast number of published collections that appeared during the latter part of the 18th century and the early 19th century endorse this view. It is not surprising if many Scottish tunes came to Shetland during this period, nor if the best were quickly adopted to swell the repertory since they were ideally suited to the dancing of the Shetland reel. Some of the most popular tunes in Shetland have been The Flowers of Edinburgh, Soldiers Joy, The East Neuk of Fife and MacDonald's Reel. These retained their Scottish names: others acquired Shetland titles. One example is the tune popular everywhere in Shetland known as Kail and Knoggit Corn ('kail and bruised oats'). It is most often known in Scotland as the reel The Bob of Fettercairn, the name provided by Neil Gow (3rd collection) but was known half a century earlier than Gow's time as the song Come Kiss with me, Come Clap with me. See Appendix Four for a text for Kail and Knoggit Corn which was still in oral tradition during the 1970s.

Appendix Two is a list of over 60 Scottish and Irish tunes recorded in Shetland as reels and showing, where appropriate, both Shetland and Scottish names. No doubt were one to ask fiddlers to play many more Scottish tunes they would do so readily, but many of the tunes on this list are distinct Shetland variants with their own

special character and were regarded as Shetland tunes by the fiddlers who played them.

A classic example is The Scalloway Lasses, included as a Shetland tune by the Shetland Folk Society in *Da Mirrie Dancers* (Ex. 17) and popular throughout Shetland. It is also found in Hoseason's small collection of 1862. I have juxtaposed both versions with the Scottish tune Fair Field House, as published in Riddell's Collection (first edition, c. 1766). A comparison of the three will help illustrate some of the changes that occur in the process of 'Shetlandising' Scottish tunes. In Scotland in Riddell's time many A-mode fiddle tunes (with A as the tonic) were in current use, so we must assume that Riddell's inclusion of F natural on the E string represented what fiddlers (at least the literate fiddlers) actually played. He harmonises it, furthermore, in A minor. In Shetland, however, fiddle modality remains paramount so that traditionally f" (first finger on the E string) is played as f#" (as in Hoseason's version). In bar 2 of Peter Fraser's version one notes the use of a C triad, easily played by rocking across the two upper strings (with down bows on the E string) which has replaced the scalar passage of earlier versions.

Strathspey reels (the earlier name for what are known today as Strathspeys), were also pressed into service as in the case of the popular strathspey Lady Mary Ramsay. This is found in the Shetland repertory as a reel commonly called Sailor Ower da Raft Trees (Ex. 18). Like Andrew Poleson, several other fiddlers use a 'high bass' tuning for this reel, enabling them to make the most of the initial broad down bow. In every case the delicate pointing of strathspey playing has been replaced by the faster vigorous and choppy bowing

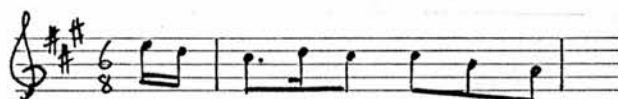
action common to Shetland reel playing.

In making comparisons of this kind, however, we must always be aware of certain inherent problems. The first is that one is comparing a fairly detailed descriptive transcription of one player's performance (in this case, Andrew Poleson) with a generalized prescriptive notation made over a century earlier. Secondly, Andrew Poleson was an exponent of an unaccompanied playing tradition, whereas Low provided a bass, as in most 18th and 19th century collections of this time. One gets little idea of how unaccompanied players might have treated the reel in his day. It may well be that village players in mainland Scotland had a style much closer to the unaccompanied Shetland style of recent years. Early collections like Oswald's (1745-60) and the MacFarlan manuscript (c. 1740) contain a number of melodies with scordatura tunings prescribed. This suggests that at that time Scottish players were making use of open strings as variable drones just as is still the practice in Shetland and western Norway. The point of this digression into discussing performance style is to remind one that, although Poleson's Sailor ower da raft trees sounds fairly remote from Lady Mary Ramsay, as it is shown in Low and as it is played today, the transcriptions exaggerate such differences and one is not really comparing like with like. Nevertheless, such comparisons do help to isolate certain stylistic features in traditional Shetland playing style.

Another useful example is the reel known in Whalsay as Jumping John (Ex. 19). It is not known outside Whalsay but both tune and title may be found in Playford's Dancing Master (1674) where the country dance Jumping Joan is described. This tune is widely travelled; it was published by Oswald in his tenth collection in



Scotland and by Feuillet in his Recueil de Contredanses (1706) in Paris. It was also prescribed by Burns for the song Her Daddie forbad and her Minnie forbad in Johnson's Musical Museum and under another name Cock o' the North, it is a popular Scottish jig or 6/8 march. It is difficult to hear the connection when listening to Andrew Poleson's Whalsay reel-time version but, this time, the connection becomes a little more obvious when the two notations are compared. In the first turning (low turning) the resemblance is at first glance difficult to see. If, however, one were to accept that in earlier times unaccompanied fiddlers aimed more at the creation of patterns of rhythmic harmony than pure melody the Shetlandising of this piece becomes easier to follow. If, for instance, unaccompanied fiddlers rendered



as



or even



(achieved by placing the second finger over both A and E strings simultaneously - a common practice as late as the 1970's among older Shetland fiddlers) then the Whalsay reel-time variant becomes more comprehensible. In the second turning there has been more radical change. The structure of the whole tune has been altered from  $\parallel : A A B A : \parallel$  to the more common reel structure  $\parallel : A A B1 B2 : \parallel$  (as in Cock of the North also) but the rhythmic structure of the second turning has been compressed into the first two bars followed by some repetition and filling-in for the other two bars.

Rarely, however, are such changes as radical as in this case; more often it is simply a case of imparting a special 'flavour' to a tune, a flavour that varies from district to district, but this will be discussed further in the next chapter. Further traces of Scottish influences on the Shetland tradition is evident in the number of reels for which words are known. In Scotland traditional texts associated with dancing tunes are rarely today found in oral circulation (always excepting the more conservative Gaelic speaking areas) and survive only in 18th- and early 19th-century collections such as Herd and Johnson. In Shetland many of the older islanders knew them well into the second half of this century. This was particularly true of Whalsay whose repertory of reels contains a higher proportion of Scottish tunes than elsewhere.

John Irvine mentioned one Whalsay fiddler Gilbert Gilbertson who was "a crack hand at converting Scottish tunes into a reel" and hinting at the sources for many Whalsay reels he continued

There were words for everyone of them you know... I mind when I began to learn to play first, I played that fast and I was playing in me grandmother's home, an' [she said] Johnnie, Johnnie, du's playing dee far ower fast', she says, 'there' can naebody ever sing the words to yon." And I says, "Well," I says, has she the words? "draw aff dee day!" she says, "They hed words, and some of them wisna very boanie!"

(SA/1959/1, collector T.Anderson)

The texts of a number of reels are given in Appendix 4; some of them remain very close to the Scots versions; in others Shetland dialect is more in evidence. Their existence points to the conservatism of the older tradition in Shetland. If, however, it does not help much with the 'hen and egg' question of which came first in Scotland - the dance-songs or the instrumental 'setting' - it does at least suggest that dancers (if not always the fiddlers) often had words in mind for the tunes they danced to and that the 'blue' nature

of many of them must have created a lot of mirth at times.

#### 4. 'FOREIGN REELS' AND HORNPIPES

As communications have improved, particularly during this century, so has the repertory of Shetland musicians expanded to absorb any tune that attracted them. Shetland men, as has become clear, travelled widely as seamen and the visits of Da Blin' Fiddler, George Stark of Dundee, introduced a number of Scottish and Irish tunes to the islands during the period between the two World Wars. But since the time of the earliest phonographs fiddlers have been able to use recordings (or repeat performances in the case of tunes popular in radio programmes) to provide an accurate reminder of the tunes they were learning. This practice has grown even more widespread since the cassette recorder became available. Consequently the process of re-working and re-creation that gave an individual Shetland flavour to Scottish and Irish tunes, that were learned before fiddlers had anything but their memories to help them, has virtually ceased.

Players nowadays tend to learn tunes as accurately as possible, often making their own recordings of broadcasts and buying, or making their own copies of, commercially available records and cassettes. Their creative urges find outlet more in the composition of new melodies and, while many would accept Sonny Bruce's advice to his don "Don't copy anybody, tak the tune and play un the way that you like to play it", the ready availability of the original tends to inhibit radical departures from these sources.

The current repertory then contains American country music, Cape Breton and other Scottish Canadian tunes, as well as the latest

Scottish and Irish compositions. The compositions of Sean MacGuire, the famous Irish fiddler (who toured Shetland in 1977, giving a number of concerts to packed halls) as well as his virtuoso settings of other Irish reels, are currently popular with many younger fiddlers. They find in the playing of such virtuosi a lively stimulus to their own fiddling. But this is dealt with in more detail in chapter 5.

#### JIG-TIME TUNES

At this point in the survey of the Shetland fiddle repertory any attempt at establishing a consistent taxonomy meets serious problems if one, at the same time, attempts to preserve some sense of historical depth. Here four classes of tune deserve to be discussed, but it is arguable whether they should or should not be discussed as dancing tunes or as part of the listening repertory. Figure 2 shows the ~~repertory~~ of jig-time music showing four provisional classes, but I shall discuss only the first three in this section, leaving the other class for the survey of 'listening' music.

(i) Many of the currently popular 'round-the-room' dances, such as the Boston Two-Step, the Lancers and the Gay Gordons, use tunes in jig-time. Since the dances themselves came in from the south a number of Scottish and English tunes came with them. But new tunes are constantly appearing and it is not surprising if a number of fiddlers have tried their hands at adding to this repertory, especially for the Boston Two-Step dance. One of the best known is William Hunter Junr.'s jig, Da Sooth End (published in Da Mirrie Dancers and elsewhere).

FIG.2.

REPERTORY OF TUNES IN JIG TIME (COMPOUND TIME)

(1) MODERN JIGS AND 6/8 MARCHES.

e.g.	Da Sooth End	jig	comp.	W.Hunter Snr.
	Norwen House	jig	"	R. Jamieson
	Janet Donaldson	jig	"	J. Jamieson
	Mjr. J.W.Angus	6/8 march	"	F.Jamieson
	Ronald Cooper	6/8 march	"	F.Jamieson
	Frank Jamieson	6/8 march	"	R.Cooper
	Scollay Boys Jig	jig	"	T.Anderson
	The Shetland Boston	6/8 march	"	F.Jamieson

(2) OLDER INDIGENOUS TUNES.a. For older dances.

Da Shaalds O Foula	Known in all districts
Da Flugga (several tunes)	" " Delting
'Kibby dance'	" " Unst

b. Tunes for unspecified dances or for listening.

Da Auld Hill Grind	Doon da Rooth (21/8 time)
Da Brig	Da Maut Man (21/8 time)
Fram Upon Him	Captain White
Garster's Dream	Cutty
Naked and Bare	Sister Jean
Christmas Day in the Morning	
Da Knot upon da Hummliband	All from John Stickle, Unst.
Vallafield	from Unst
Da Greenland Man's Tune	from J. Laurenson, Fetlar
Cataroni	" A. Peterson
Aith Rant	" Cunningsburgh
Da Full Rigged Ship	" Peter Fraser (Walls)

c. Problematic tunes from written records

Midnight and Da Puir Man is Dead	... Hoseason MS
Da Boanie Isle O Whalsay	... Johnston (Old Lore Miscellany)

(3) IMPORTED JIGS.

e.g. The Irish Washerwoman, Drops of Brandy etc.

(4) WEDDING MARCHES AND SONGS.

Noo I must leave father and mother	Origin Scottish
Woo'd and Married and Aa	" "
Black Jock (The Black Joke)	" "
Da Bride's a Boanie Thing	" "
Kiss her and Clap Her	" Scottish ?
A 'Bride's Reel' from Papa Stour	" ?
The Westside Bride's March	" ?

(ii) There is also a repertory of more than twenty indigenous older tunes (some of which may also be used for the above dances but which are equally often played as listening pieces. They are often referred to as 'Shetland Jigs' and are customarily grouped into sets for playing and dancing purposes, though they were collected as single tunes from various districts by members of the Shetland Folk Society and <sup>by</sup> Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, and re-introduced to the repertory. Very little is known of the dances to which these tunes originally belonged, nor even if they were danced at all. By all accounts, Shetland reels and Aald reels were about the only dances known to be danced in Shetland throughout most of the 19th century, if one leaves aside for one moment the country dance known as The Shaalds of Foula.

(iii) Some jig-time dances were introduced from Scotland, such as the Haymakers Jig and the Irish Washerwoman, but only during the last decade of the 19th century. They were introduced by Scots girls who came up in their hundreds during the herring season to live and work as gutters and packers at the numerous fishing stations which mushroomed each year around the Shetland shoreline. The Shetland jigs, however, appear to pre-date this period.

The best known of the Shetland jigs is Da Shaalds of Foula. It has already been discussed because of the fact that its tune is frequently played and notated in either jig or reel time as well as something between the two. The dance itself is discussed by T.M. Flett in an article in The Shetland Folk Book, (vol. 6, 1976, pp.22-31) where he concludes that it was possibly brought to Shetland from Sweden via England for it is very similar to the Swedish folk dance, Våva Vådmal, which was introduced to Britain under the name, Norwegian Country Dance (T.M. Flett, 1976, pp. 30-31).

Two other dances were supposedly danced in jig-time. One is mentioned by Shuldham-Shaw in connection with the tune Cutty (Ex. 20) which the Unst fiddler, John Stickle, maintained was "a kind of kibby dance", performed "entirely in a sitting-on-the-heels position", (Shuldham-Shaw, 1947, p.76 and 1962, p. 136).

The second dance appears to have been known only in the Delting district (Mainland Shetland) where it was performed within living memory as a kind of 'nach-tanz' to the Shetland reel with the rhythm changing smartly into jig-time from reel-time. Four tunes for this dance have been collected. Tom Robertson of Delting provided two tunes and two further titles. The first tune, for which he also sang words, is a variant of a Scottish song, well known during the early 18th century and included in Johnson's Musical Museum in a rather ornate setting that contrasts with the simplicity and strength of the Shetland version (Ex. 21). The title of Mr. Robertson's second tune, Doon the Burn Davie, also belongs to an old Scottish song, but his tune (Ex. 22) is quite unlike any of the printed settings of that name which I have examined (e.g. in Orpheus Caledonius or the Musical Museum). Three other tunes named The Flugga by the musicians who played them are similar to Doon the Burn Davie (cf. P. Shuldham-Shaw's MS and Tom Anderson's version on SA/1958/62). Both Shuldham-Shaw and Anderson collected them in the Delting area). The fact that Saw ye Nae My Peggie (which Shuldham-Shaw also collected in Fetlar as a song) is in a mixture of 9/8 and 12/8 and that the other tune is in 6/8 time suggests that the dance was not of the kind requiring a strict number of beats to each section.

While it is possible that both these dances, the 'kibby' dance and The Flugga, were once more widely known in Shetland, we have



no other records that would substantiate this. The other possibility, which has already been mentioned, is that older tunes were played and danced in earlier days in a rhythm that was neither 2/4 nor 6/8 but something between the two. Hoseason's version of The Shaalds of Foula has already been cited as an example. Two other tunes with similar rhythm are to be found in Hoseason's manuscript, called Midnight (Ex. 23) and Garster's Dream. The second tune is still popular today but is played in strict jig-time throughout, without the intriguing 'hesitations' shown in Hoseason's version (Ex. 24a & b). Further evidence for the hypothesis is to be seen in the tune which Hoseason called Qualsay and which today is known as Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay. Hoseason wrote the tune in reel time; another version was published half a century later, but in 6/8 time (see Ex. 25). Today the tune is generally played in reel time, though in the 1950s at least one fiddler, the late Jimmy Scollay of Burravoe, played it in 6/8 time, his version being noted down by Shuldham-Shaw in the key of G. These three examples, together with the Foula Reel, suggest that possibly there were never any widely known jig-time dances, but simply that a number of tunes in an 'ambiguous' rhythm have at various times during the past 100 years become 'rationalised', most into reel-time, but some into jig-time. One should not discount the possibility that some never were dance tunes at all. Twelve of the twenty-one tunes in this category were recorded from one source, John Stickle of Unst, and he, having received most of them as 'listening' tunes from his grandfather, played them rather slowly. However, those which have been taken up and popularised by the Shetland Folk Society are played today as true jigs at a brisk tempo and are frequently used for any dance today requiring music in jig-time.

## OTHER DANCE MUSIC

MARCHES, POLKAS, WALTZES, STRATHSPEYS.

In any society the repertory of social dances changes fairly rapidly since the leaders in such dancing are usually the young unmarried men and women. A new dance comes into vogue, is popular for a time and then passes into obsolescence. Nevertheless certain pieces associated with those dances live on as attractive miniatures. Polkas are a case in point. When the dance came into vogue a repertory of polka melodies was imported also. A few have survived, though one seldom sees a polka danced in Shetland today, and four tunes are regarded as Shetland polkas - The Boanie Polka, The Seven Step Polka, Sister Jean (possibly taking its name from a 6/8 tune known to John Stickle) and a tune recently named The Hamnavoe Polka by Tom Anderson, since it was one played by his grandfather who lived in Hamnavoe in North Mavine. All four tunes are published in Haand Me Down da Fiddle, a collection of 55 pieces (mostly reels) made for teaching purposes by Tom Anderson and Pamela Swing (Stirling, 1979).

Apart from those common Highland tunes used everywhere for dancing Schottisches, the strathspey has only very recently proved of any real attraction to Shetland musicians. In earlier times strathspeys were as often as not, as we have seen, quickly converted into reels. Recently, however, a few musicians, notably Frank Jamieson and his son, Ronald, have tried their hands at composing strathspeys, but more as listening pieces, and more as a challenge to those Shetland fiddlers interested in playing the sharply pointed rhythms characteristic of the fiddle style of Strathspey and

north-east Scotland and for which some tricky bow management is needed.

Marches and waltzes are a different case, however, since both are frequently required for currently popular social dances. Before the 1950s the march repertory consisted of well-known Scottish tunes such as The Balkan Hills, The Cameron Highlanders and Scotland the Brave. Since then, however, numerous lively marches have been composed, though somewhat fewer waltzes. Fort Charlotte and Da Guizers March (both composed by Gideon Stove and published in Da Mirrie Dancers) are typical examples of Shetland marches used in Shetland for dancing Two-Steps. Many new Shetland tunes rapidly become known around Scotland and further afield. Ian Burns received reports of his tune, Spootiskerry, being heard on a commercial Swedish L.P. and being whistled in the streets of Wellington, New Zealand (SA/1980/19/1B). In recent years Scottish dance-band musicians have visited Shetland during their vacations (often being invited to play at the Lerwick Accordion and Fiddle Club and for the Up Helly Aa dances) and have taken away with them new Shetland tunes that have caught their fancy, promptly making use of them in their next LP or radio broadcast. Several Shetland composers arrange to have their tunes transcribed for them (for few are musically literate) and photocopied for private distribution, or printed for wider dissemination (as well as to safeguard copyright). Examples are to be found in a volume of 15 tunes entitled Dance Music from Shetland and the North-east (vol. 1, Lerwick, 1975): it includes Frank Jamieson's Young Willie Hunter (march) and his reel, Leveneep Head, as well as Willie Hunter Junr.'s jig, The Sooth End. Appendices 5 and 6 list recently composed marches and waltzes that have been recorded for the School of Scottish Studies up to 1976; but they must represent only a

small fraction of the number of gay pieces that have made their appearance during the last 30 years.

This completes our survey of the fiddlers' dance tune repertory. It has ranged from pieces long obsolete to those composed within the past few years. Needless to say, it can never be complete for the repertory is growing and changing constantly. It is inevitably becoming less a specifically Shetland repertory: the growth of the mass media and of other forms of communication have facilitated this change. Most Shetland musicians would admit that new Shetland tunes are sounding more Scottish - perhaps 'pan-British' or 'international' would be better adjectives. This is the result of a mutual interchange of musical ideas. For instance, the march, Donald Ian Rankin, is one of the most popular tunes in the Shetlands today - it was composed by a Scottish dance band leader who lives and works in Liverpool.

#### THE LISTENING REPERTORY

It has already been suggested that the title of this category is really little more than a convenience, a catch all that includes, in addition to song airs and other pieces, tunes that are no longer danced nor have been for several generations. It was earlier suggested that social dances are particularly subject to rapid change. This is particularly true in western Europe and America during this century where, in many cases, it is in the interest of the mass-producers of dance fashions and dance music to ensure, if possible, a rapid succession of different dance styles. The result is that the dances of one age group are considered old-fashioned by the next younger age-group. However, the best tunes of any dance vogue live on in the repertory of the musicians who learned them long after the dances themselves have been outmoded, and, if they are attractive

enough, they may survive for generations as 'listening pieces', as in the case of the polkas cited earlier and the hornpipe (see below).

Furthermore, even in places where country dance bands still flourish, the fiddler himself is no longer the prime provider of dance music, his place having been taken over by accordionists or guitarists. The fiddlers today, therefore, play as much for their own enjoyment and that of their friends as they do for others to dance to and this stimulates the creation of a listening repertory of its own, in addition to that which might be based on dance genres, new or old.

Two other factors must be borne in mind as we discuss the traditional listening repertory as such. The first is that few of the older so-called 'listening pieces' are played today other than by Tom Anderson, a leading figure in the Shetland folklore movement, and by his many pupils or former pupils; they belong now to a folkloristic rather than a general repertory. The second point worth noting is that the following list of 'listening tunes' (figure 3) has been collected from very few sources, the major source being the playing of John Stickle, whose repertory was collected and reported on by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw (see JEFDSS, xi/3, 1962, p.129-147). Other sources have been the playing of Peter Fraser of Finnigirth in the Walls area on the west side of Mainland Shetland, and a group of older fiddlers from the island of Papa Stour (Fraser Hughson, Laurie Fraser and John Fraser). Even the legacy of tunes associated with the different stages of the wedding ritual come from only very few sources, primarily John Stickle of Unst, Peter Fraser of Finnigirth, Walls (Mainland) and two Whalsay fiddlers, John Irvine and Andrew Poleson.

FIG. 3.  
LISTENING TUNES: LISTED FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE  
SCHOOL OF SCOTTISH STUDIES

CEREMONIAL MUSIC

1. Wedding tunes.

The Bride's March from Unst	John Stickle	Unst
The Bride's a Boanie Thing	" "	"
Du's bon lang awa and a'm tocht lang ta see dee.	Peter Fraser	Walls
Da Farder Ben da Welcomer	" "	"
Mak me Fain ta Follow Dee	" "	"
plus tunes in jig time listed in Fig.2. and:-		
Norwick wedding march	comp. Tom Anderson	
Hillswick Wedding	" "	
A Yell wedding march	Bobbie Jamieson	Yell

2. Yule time tunes

The Day Dawn	Peter Fraser	Walls
The Day o Dawie	John Irvine	Whalsay

NON RITUAL MUSIC

1. Slow airs and song airs etc.

Auld Swarra	Peter Fraser	Walls
The Mill o Finnigirth	" "	"
The Yairds o Finnigirth	" "	"
The Full Rigged Ship	" "	"
The Silver Bow and variations	" "	"
Slow air from Unst	John Stickle	Unst
Doon da Rooth	" "	"
Unst Boat song (fiddle version of song)	" "	"
Waterman's Hornpipe	" "	"
The Delting Spinning Song	Tom Anderson	Delting
The Fetlar Lullaby		Fetlar
Shetland Dandling song	Peter Scollay	S. Yell
Shetland Lullaby	" "	"

2. Modern compositions

Da Slokkitt Lights	Slow air	Tom Anderson
Dee Side	Slow air	" "
Da Auld Resting Chair	Slow air	" "
Linga Soond	Slow air	Frank Jamieson
Margaret Anne Robertson	Slow air	" "
Da Auld Noost	Slow air	Ronald Jamieson
Maggie Anne's Lament	Slow air	Peter Scollay
Kail Blades and Capsie	air	John Fraser
Sandie, Scott and Paddy	air	" "
Ul day in Papa	air	George Peterson
The Yogie Din	air	" "

3. Novelties

The Four Poster Bed, The Hen's March over the Midden,  
The Soo's Lament for Raw Tatties

4. Strathspeys

The Sands of Muness and Da sooth Lea, both comp. Frank Jamieson

5. Hornpipes

The Londonderry, The Liverpool, The Miller's, The Orkney Isles,  
The Shetland Isles, Young Willie Hunter and other modern tunes

6. Miscellaneous

Hylta dance from Fetlar  
Goodnight, goodnight be wi you aa from Papa Stour (not like  
Scottish tune of same name)  
plus tunes in fig 2, popular song airs and jazz tunes etc.

## CEREMONIAL MUSIC

### WEDDING TUNES

"Come fy let us aa to the wedding  
For there will be liltin there."  
(The Musical Museum, vol.i, No. 58)

The traditional role of the fiddler at weddings in Shetland has already been mentioned. In addition to dance music, including that for the ritually important Bride's Reels, the fiddler was required to provide music at several other points in the rite.

Peter Fraser, in his dialect account of an 'Old Time Shetland Wedding', a description of the last old style wedding in his parish over fifty years ago (Shetland Folk Book, ii, 1957) mentions five tunes that were required for the ritual in his district. As a fiddler himself, he knew all the tunes and communicated them to the Swedish researcher, Otto Anderson, in the 1930s (see Anderson, 1938, for a discussion of these tunes and for some rather unreliable transcriptions). As a member of the Shetland Folk Society, he also introduced them to members of the Shetland Fiddle Band and recorded them for their principal collector Tom Anderson.

In his account the fiddler accompanied the groom's party during their trek to the bride's home, playing for some light-hearted dancing en route and striking up on arrival with the tune Du's been lang awa and A'm tocht lang ta see dee (Ex. 26). The alternations between C and D tonality in the tune could belong equally to Scandinavian and Scottish musical style, though the large skips involving rapid crossing is <sup>somewhat</sup> suggestive of the Aald Reel structure. The tune was known nowhere else in Shetland. The second



melody played almost immediately afterwards was a cue for the groom's party to kiss the bride's maids ceremonially and was called Kiss Her and Clap Her (Fraser, 1957, p.60). This title is reminiscent of a line that Burns once noted for the song Here Awa, there Awa, Wandering Willie:-

"Gin ye meet my love, kiss her and clap her."

and its three, presumably traditional, verses collected by Herd contain sentiments that make them suitable for bridal rites. The first verse runs:-

Here awa, there awa, wandering Willie  
Here awa, there awa, wandering Willia  
Lang have I sought thee, Dear have I bought thee  
Now I have gotten my Willie again

(J.C.Dick, 1962, p.128 & 398-399)

Peter Fraser's tune (Ex. 27) could fit Burns' words quite neatly but the tune bears no resemblance to any published melodies for this song. Again, however, the alternation between A and G tonality is a well-known feature of Scottish melody and, if played in strict 6/8 tempo, it sounds very like many Highland jigs or pipe marches.

The same could not be said of the third of Peter Fraser's five tunes, The 'Bride's March, traditionally played during the walk to wherever the minister was intending to marry the couple (in *Da Mirrie Dancers*, p.11). The other march, played on the way back from the religious ceremony, was well-known all over Shetland, Scotland, and possibly England also, under its name, Woo'd and Married and Aa. (Pipers are often engaged to play the tune at Scottish weddings as the bridal pair leave the kirk.) Peter Fraser's fifth tune, aptly called Da Farder Ben da Welcomer (Ex. 28) was played as a welcome on the return of the bridal party at the bride's home. It appears to have no Scottish antecedents and was known also to John Stickle of Unst, whose

slightly different version was published by Shuldham-Shaw (op. cit. 1947, p.80). It must once have been known elsewhere in Shetland for it is also listed (but not notated) in Hoseason's manuscript (1863). Neither Stickle nor Fraser gave any hint that it may have been danced, but the title appears in a list of 'names of Reels or Dance Music collected in the Island of Unst' in the Notes section of the Old Lore Miscellany (vol. iv, 1913). Its asymmetrical phrasing and internal repetitions lead one to think that it is not of Scottish derivation.

Of the three wedding tunes collected from John Stickle in Unst the second and third are definitely Scottish. Both were played in Unst as marches. The Bride's a Boanie Thing is a variant of a tune of the same name published in early Scottish collections. Stickle played the tune in G but Scottish variants are given in A, a key favoured by Tom Anderson, who has revived the tune in Shetland using an A-E-A-E tuning so as to enhance the 'Scandinavian' flavour. In Ex. 29, a & b, it is compared with the version in Oswald's Caledonian Pocket Companion (pt. viii, p.21).

The third Unst melody is likewise a variant of an old Scottish tune. Stickle's version of The Bride's March is very similar to the song air called The Rock and the Wee Pickle Tow. Stickle told Shuldham-Shaw, the collector, that this tune was used to accompany the procession from the kirk after the marriage and that 'from almost every house passed on the way there would come a fiddler on to the doorstep would play this tune as the procession passed'. If the locals knew the traditional text of the song, it must have caused some merriment and, at the same time, could serve as a warning to future young wives for it takes the form of an 'auld wife's' lament on the difficulties of learning the wifely art of spinning. An even older



A double wedding at Skeld - August 1963  
(photo D. Coutts)



John Irvine of Saltness, Whalsay  
from a wedding album (photo D. Coutts) (c.1960)

source suggests that the tune may well have been known as a bridal march in Scotland also, for it first appears in John Playford's Musick's Handmaid (1678) entitled A Scottish March. Stickle's and Playford's versions are compared in Ex. 30. Peter Fraser's Bride's March (to the minister) seems to be have been known only in his district of Walls and it does not fit a text usually associated with the march to the minister. <sup>This text</sup> ~~It~~ was quoted in 'Recollections of a Shetland Wedding' (Appendix I) and was known in many parts of Shetland. Its words run:-

Now must I leave father and mother? [or, How can I....] Now  
must I leave sister and brother?  
Now must I leave both kith and kin  
And follow (the back of) a fremd man's son?  
(...after...)

This is one of the several tunes also associated with weddings in Whalsay and known to both John Irvine and Andrew Poleson. A different tune sung to the same text was recorded in Delting and is included for comparison with the Whalsay tune in Ex. 31. The Delting tune does not fit the words quite so well as the Whalsay tune unless the last line of text is shortened.

In Whalsay the well-known march, Woo'd and Married and Aa, was played for the march home after the minister's ceremony, as in Walls and elsewhere. John Irvine recalled that in his youth it was also played by fiddlers during the signing of the register. The tune and text is almost exactly as published in early Scottish collections and was known to most older Whalsay people during my period of fieldwork.

In Whalsay, music was also required for the ritual of 'bedding the bride', a custom which ended, according to John Irvine, around 1910.

- J.I. The bride was put to bed, and the whole lasses, the whole women went into the bride's hoose and they put her to bed. And there was no man allowed in there at all - unless the fiddler - and I was always it so, I - [laughs]
- E.S. So you actually played there?
- J.I. Yes, yes, O yes, I had to step up and play the fiddle.
- E.S. Were there any special tunes?
- J.I. Yes, there were special tunes, but, oh mun, I've lost the most of them now.... That was my job. And there were - it's a lilt - you see, there were no dancing, more as a lilt. There were no room to dance you see, the hoose was aa full as she could ha'd you see, there were fifty or sixty lasses 'd be within. Then after they got her in, aa the men cam in wi the bridegroom. [laughs]. Oh, it were a great thing.  
(SA/1961/27; fieldworker, Elizabeth Sinclair)

John Irvine remembered a suite of three tunes which he played at this ritual. They were also known to Andrew Poleson. All three were played with A-E-A-E tuning. Sandwiched between two reels (Grieg's Pipes and The Black and The Brown - only the first being known in Scottish collections) was a slower tune called in Whalsay But Your House and Ben Your House or Black Jock (Ex. 32). According to some informants the first two lines were:-

But your house and ben your house  
This house is like a bridal house.

But the tune played was, in fact, known throughout Britain and Ireland during the 18th century as The Black Joke (or Joak) and is linked to a variety of texts, all of them bawdy and all concerned with sexual intercourse. Some of the texts are the creations of music-hall hacks, such as the earliest known - The Original Black Joke Sent from Dublin - which begins:-

No mortal sure can blame ye man  
Who prompted by nature will act as he can.....  
(song sheet c. 1720, Mitchell Library, Glasgow)

Simple and more direct 'folk' versions were known in Scotland. Burns wrote a parody beginning 'My girl she's airy....' (Poems and



Genuine bawdry is often found in such situations elsewhere in the world. According to Legman (1964), "the purpose of such songs... was and is evidently apotropaic, being intended to ward off the evil eye .... dangerously present at all moments of happiness, or of success and victory" (The Horn Book, 1964, p. 388). It is likely, too, that such humour served to release anxiety on the part of the young initiate. Finally, if the text were anything like the Crawford text, the explicit detail could have served also as a piece of last-minute sex education - an example of how music is sometimes used in a situation that allows one to sing what might be too embarrassing to say.

One other tune requires mention in the context of wedding tunes. It was recorded from John Fraser, a native of Papa Stour, who remembered his father playing it but did not know its name. He was told later by friends in Lerwick that it could have been a bride's reel. Presumably, his friends (possibly members of the Shetland Folk Society) identified it as such because of its slow 9/8 time (Ex. 33) and it is interesting that so many of the Shetland and Scottish wedding tunes are in slow jig time. One could hazard the guess that such tunes derive from old Scottish dance-songs used for circle dances (possibly of the Faroese chain type) and that, as in the case of bride's reels today, their close attachment to the wedding rite ensured their survival into the present century.

Unless they are consciously revived (as only occasionally happens today in Shetland) these wedding tunes are no longer played in the wedding context and, indeed, even those few older fiddlers who kept them as part of their repertory as late as World War II have, with the death of Andrew Poleson in 1979, all passed on. The tunes



survive now as a historical record of the much valued musical role of fiddlers at weddings who, with their playing, lent dignity, charm and sometimes humour to the various stages of the ritual.

## 2. NEW YEAR OR CHRISTMAS TUNES

The custom of fiddlers playing the tune variously known as The Day Dawns, The Day O Dawie, or The Day Daywen around certain houses early on New Year's morning has already been mentioned in connection with Edmondstone's account of social life (Ch.1, p. 66). Records of tunes with such a name go back to the beginning of the 16th century in Scotland with Dunbar's mention of Now the Day Dawis in his poem To the Merchants of Edinburgh (see Dick, 1962, p.450 for notes on early records of this tune. The setting published in 1822 by Hibbert (Ex.34a) has been the source for a number of printed versions since then, and Hoseason includes a similar version in his manuscript (Ex.34b). But it is likely that tunes of this name would have survived in oral tradition without the aid of notation. John Irvine has recounted how he learned The Day o Dawie from the singing of an old friend and he remarked then that it was the custom for parties of men to go around the island singing the tune (though he never heard words to it, presumably his informant diddled it over to him). This custom of singing around the houses is still strong in Whalsay and the writer has himself experienced some of the musical merrymaking that traditionally takes place in Cullivoe (Yell) on New Year's night. But the custom of playing a melody of this name as part of a winter solstice ritual seems to have passed long ago. Unlike the notated versions of The Day Dawns John Irvine's half-remembered version (Ex.35) is partly in the major key.

Christmas Day in the Morning, or Da Day Dawn are the names of a different air collected from John Stickle by P.S.Shuldham-Shaw. Unlike the better known Day Dawn, Stickle's tune does not appear to have been played outside the Stickle family himself and was possibly the composition of Fredamond Stickle. He played it each year at the home of the local laird at Bunes in Unst. For the music and an accompanying note see Shuldham-Shaw, 1962, p.140.

#### NON-RITUAL MUSIC

The repertoires of most of the fiddlers I have met in Shetland include one or two airs that have taken their fancy. Bobbie Peterson's father, for instance, always played a slow and barely recognisable version of the song The Ewie with the Crooked Horn before putting his fiddle away. Some musicians, however, have carefully cherished a repertoire handed down to them within their family and two such sources for some of the most intriguing and probably oldest 'listening' tunes in Shetland have been John Stickle and Peter Fraser.

Most of John Stickle's listening repertoire has been published and commented on by Shuldham-Shaw (1947 and 1962) or by the Shetland Folk Society in their volumes of The Shetland Folk Book and Da Mirrie Dancers. These pieces comprise an interesting mixture of tunes of supposedly Norse or Scottish origin. Their rhythmic structure is often problematic. Shuldham-Shaw notated The Waterman's Hornpipe in 5/2 time (1962, p.133), Doon da Rooth in 21/8 (Da Mirrie Dancers, p.17) and others show abrupt changes of metre.

Fewer of Peter Fraser's tunes have been published, possibly owing to the difficulty of notating their unusual rhythms. His



Cullivoe hall laid out for a wedding feast  
the dance takes place immediately afterwards (1972)



Jean Pole with Betty Henderson (1959)

version of the 'lament' Auld Swarra, published recently in Haand Me Doon da Fiddle (Anderson and Swing, 1979) is somewhat similar to Stickle's published tune. Like Stickle's version the abrupt pitch changes suggest Norse origins and the name itself has Norse roots. Three other slow airs were known to Peter Fraser. The Silver Bow has a set of variations attached to it. The other two tunes are given local names - The Mill of Finnigirth (printed in Anderson and Swing, op.cit., p.36) and The Yairds of Finnigirth. This would seem to suggest local origins, as is the case with two of Peter Fraser's own compositions - reels called Da Hill of Finnigirth and Da Burn o Finnigirt (Da Mirrie Dancers, p.28). The home of the Frasers was known as the house of Finnigirth, now a ruin. The Yairds of Finnigirth in fact turns out to be a beautiful ornamental slow version of a longways country dance called Scotland in Playford's Dancing Master (14th ed., 1709, p.19), given in Ex.36. A possible explanation is that the sept of the clan Fraser which came to Shetland brought some of their country dances with them but that long ago the dance and its name were forgotten and that only the tune survived, acquiring a distinctively local flavour over the years.

One more listening tune of Peter Fraser's deserves a mention because it was popularised during the late 1970s (through the teaching and playing of Tom Anderson). Many Shetland tunes are enjoyed because of their programmatic content - some feature in the melody being associated with its picturesque title. In this case the opening of Peter Fraser's tune The Full Rigged Ship conjures up the image of a fine sailing ship and the little hesitations and sudden melodic turns are explained by Tom Anderson as the motion experienced when such a vessel mounts the ocean swell, pauses and dips its bow again (Ex.37).

## NOVELTIES

Three novelty pieces have long been popular in Shetland though they are probably not of Shetland origin. They should perhaps also be classed as program music. In The Four Posts of the Bed, a lively reel-time tune, the fiddler is required to give four rhythmic taps with the base of the bow, one on each of the four quarters of the belly of his instrument between left-hand pizzicato chords. The other two novelties, The Hen's March over the Midden and The Soo's Lament for Raw Tatties exploit the humour that is produced when non-musical, animal noises are incorporated into musical pieces. Both feature in the repertoires of a number of fiddlers and both have been printed among British collections as early as the mid-18th century.

As is becoming apparent, the more closely we examine much of the Shetland repertory the more we find it has entered Shetland from further south, Scotland mostly, but it is a pointer to the conservative strength of the Shetland tradition that so many pieces current in Shetland have survived there (mostly without the aid of notation) where elsewhere they have long been forgotten. The Hen's March, for example, has been re-introduced into the Scottish musical scene as much by the playing of Tom Anderson as anyone else. His setting is close to that published by Walsh in his Third Book (Walsh, op.cit [1730], p.19) where it is called The Cackling of the Hens, though not as close as another variant recorded by Tom Anderson from Miss Jean Pole (SA/1960/214)

## THE NEWER LISTENING REPERTORY

As the fiddler has increasingly given his place in the dance hall over to the accordionist and 'retired to his den', so is the repertory changing in response to this move. His playing style is changing also but will be discussed in the following chapter. We have seen that new dance tunes continue to be made and are often taken up by dance bands, but younger fiddlers are more interested in them for the technical challenges they often present.

The case of the Hornpipe genre illustrates this well. On the mainland of Britain the dancing of hornpipes has long since ceased except among those who practise solo exhibition dancing (where the Hornpipe in 2/4 time flourishes alongside the various solo Highland dances and clog dances). But for at least a century the Hornpipe has been a favourite genre among fiddlers in Scotland, not to mention Ireland, and the proper style of playing hornpipes has been the subject of several dissertations, as for example in W.C. Honeyman's Strathspey, Reel and Hornpipe Tutor (Dundee, n.d. c.190?). The nautical connections of the Hornpipe may also have accounted for the Hornpipe's popularity in Shetland. Interestingly, the popular reel Soldier's Joy, known throughout the British Isles and Scandinavia also is called a Hornpipe in Denmark. Many of these pieces have been played as reels for dancing the Shetland Reel (e.g. Andrew Poleson's playing of The Fisher's Hornpipe) but others as in Scotland, are enjoyed because of their technical challenges. Often a concert fiddler is asked to play the well-known Banks or the Bees Wing hornpipes, for apart from their attractiveness, these hornpipes are in Eflat and Bflat respectively and anything composed in a 'flat' key is considered to be a real test of a fiddler's ability. Several Irish hornpipes

have become popular since visits to the islands in the late 1970s by Sean Macguire, the celebrated Irish fiddler. Lastly a number of Shetlanders have made their own hornpipes. They include: Young Willie Hunter, composed by William Hunter Junr. on the birth of his first son; The Foradale Hornpipe (Ronald Jamieson); Sandy Bell's Hornpipe (J. Smith of Burra Isle); The Tailor's Hornpipe (Bobbie Peterson) and Yock her in Dee Bight, Boy (Tom Anderson). These few examples are taken from the archive of the School of Scottish Studies.

The other genre which has become increasingly popular during the 1970s is the slow air in the style of Scottish slow airs of the 18th century (by such fiddle composers as William Marshall, Niel Gow and sons, and Cpt. Simon Fraser). As yet however the popularity of such tunes tends to be restricted to Lerwick musicians and their audiences, for as the capital and main port it has been the place where new fashions first arrive. Thus while we find Lerwick musicians such as the late Frank Jamieson, his son Ronald, William Hunter and Tom Anderson playing Scottish slow airs and composing others in more or less the same style, we find less interest elsewhere; for in the other islands the concept of the fiddle as the instrument for dancing is still paramount. One Cullivoe fiddler remarked "No-one plays Slow Airs around here - that's for funerals!" (SA/1980/12). This must explain why there are so few slow airs in the older Shetland repertory. However, such changes as this are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

#### THE MAKING OF THE REPERTORY

We have seen that the whole repertory consists of a mixture of indigenous tunes and others from outside Shetland, Scotland mostly. Since so many Shetlanders are making new tunes at present it is



possible to discuss the creation of such tunes. Laurence Williamson's folkloric note cited in Chapter 1 includes a reference to tunes which were reputed to be of fairy origin. Such tales abound: often a fiddler is returning from a dance and is so tired that he takes a rest by the road side, falling asleep at the side of a fairy mound and when he awakes later and goes on his way, his head is ringing with a tune which 'the fairies have taught him', or which he has heard coming from the mound. The other source of inspiration has been some monotonous rhythm from, for example, running machinery. Harry Tulloch's testimony combines elements of both situations:-

I mind being playing at a wedding in the hall here and the next day I wasn't feeling too good of course. But - I was needing some sheaves of corn and hay down from the Wart hill. So I got the old BMB single cylinder six-horse engine going.... and as soon as that engine started here was all the tunes flying through my mind.

(SA1972/115)

It seems that tiredness after a night of music making is a condition that allows the mind to generate new melodies unconsciously from the stock of themes and formulae that are still whirling around in the mind. Often a new tune, or at least a part of it, takes shape 'in a flash'. This was frequently true for the late Frank Jamieson:-

I might only get the first part - but if I get the first part, the second part is no bother.

P.C. It comes when you're not thinking about it?

F.J. That's right, or I might be fooling around on the fiddle you see, and suddenly play a phrase which I like, and then I'll build around it. But sometimes I get one part you see, and the second part will beat me - but what I did was I just left it and maybe a week or a fortnight later this would come in my mind. And I'll pick up the fiddle and play a second piece to it right away. It might come in a flash just like that. Margaret Ann Robertson was composed like that.

Alan Tulloch's remarks on his composing also lend weight to the idea that many tunes are created as a result of some unconscious

structuring process that can be going on in the brain, and is brought to the level of the conscious by some external stimulation, often of a rhythmic nature. Many of his tunes were composed while at the boring task of gutting fish while on board the Floris at sea, with the rhythm of the boat's diesel engine thumping away in the background. For him too the process of conscious realisation seems to take place only at the very last moment:-

There'd been something going on in my head on the line of a tune all day that must have been fighting to come out. The strange thing was [that when he picked up the fiddle] that when I started to play it I had no idea what it was going to be - it could have been a waltz, it could have been anything.  
(SA1977/109)

Several fiddlers have mentioned the anguish they feel when they become conscious of an attractive tune that has formed in their heads but, having no fiddle near them, nor that other aid to composition - the tape recorder, they are unable to remember it later.

Bobbie Peterson's explanation of how he composed Cabister Head was given in Chapter 2 and other accounts are given in the notes to the disc Shetland Fiddle Music (TNGM117). Taken all together they match very closely the findings of S.C. Jardine who carried out an investigation of composition processes among traditional Irish fiddlers (Jardine, 1981).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MUSICAL STYLE AND PERFORMANCE STYLE

Much descriptive musicology is necessarily comparative in that one is continually having to make comparisons between that which is familiar to us and that which is not. So in answer to the question 'What is 'x' music like?', one usually finds it necessary to begin by saying that it is like 'y' but different from it in certain respects. Such an answer pre-supposes that the questioner already knows something about the music 'y' and that he knows that the questioner also knows something about the same music. In the case of Shetland fiddle music the most obvious comparison would seem to be with other British and Irish music. But clearly also the evidence of the Auld Reels (chapter 3) points to the impingement of a Scottish (British) musical culture on an earlier Norse culture. So to isolate the distinctive features of Shetland fiddle music one would need to study Scottish, Irish and Scandinavian instrumental music and make comparisons with that of Shetland. In such a general survey as this there is insufficient room for that kind of approach, though it must be admitted that the results of such an enquiry would interest most Shetlanders who are very conscious of their Scandinavian past and often ready to emphasise how different their culture is from that of their Scottish neighbours.

Such an answer is also essentially historical and it would be insufficient to assume that all non-Scottish or non-Irish feature in the present day music of Shetland must be remnant features from an older Scandinavian tradition - they might just as well be remnants of an earlier Scottish tradition, for it is probably true to say that the

communities of rural Shetland, like those of the Western Isles, have been more highly resistant to change and more insulated from the more recent non-indigenous influences than mainland Scotland. We have already seen that many reels in the repertory are variants of vocal and instrumental tunes popular in mainland Scotland during the earlier part of the 18th century but now rarely heard outside Shetland. Might not a Shetland performance style be a similar survival?

One can do little more than speculate on such matters because of the dearth of useful data on the early 18th century playing style of either Scotland or Scandinavia. But before leaving historical questions one other aspect needs consideration. Virtually all the musical data on which this study of the repertory is based was collected on tape between 1951 and 1980. That in itself was a period of rapid change. Many of the older informants, fine fiddlers, belonging to a tradition of unaccompanied playing for dancing, have since died. They were prime examples of what Shetlanders affectionately call 'da aald Shetland fiddler' and this term in itself points to changed notions about fiddling and implies that there is now a newer kind of fiddler. During my fieldwork period both kinds of fiddler were active, but in different contexts, and it makes sense to discuss the performance styles of both quite separately.

The general musical characteristics of the repertory will first be considered: taken together they define the musical style of the repertory. Convenient sources for a discussion of general musical style are to be found in the printed and manuscript collections of the Shetland Folk Society (eg. Da Mirrie Dancers) and in Haand Me Doon Da Fiddle (Anderson and Swing, 1977) for with few exceptions these may be regarded as generalised prescriptive versions of tunes known and performed in most areas of Shetland and may usefully be used for trait analysis. In the second part of this chapter we make use of detailed descriptive transcriptions which are records of the particular performances of selected fiddlers and form useful starting points for a discussion performance style. By this term we mean the different ways in which individual fiddlers or communities of fiddlers in different parts of Shetland perform the shared repertory.

#### MUSICAL STYLE

Two sets of non-musical factors combine to have a powerful effect on the musical style of any fiddle repertory. The first is social; the second might be called bio-mechanical and arises from the potential and restrictions of the instrument itself. Taking social factors first of all, I have already stressed that the fiddle in Shetland was, above all, an instrument for dance, and dance even today has an importance in Shetland social life that far outweighs the

frequency of its occurrence. In dance music the prime ingredient is rhythm. So far as the Shetland reel is concerned, as it is danced today, one performance rarely lasts for more than 2-3 minutes for it is so energetic that the dancers are quickly exhausted. So a suite of two or at most three musical items in the same or related tonality is entirely adequate for each dance. The essential binary structure of each serves as a musical parallel to the alternations between reeling in pairs in a figure of eight pattern and dancing on the spot facing one's partner. In Cullivoe in 1973 the tempo of the reel when danced was  $MM \downarrow = 114$ , each crotchet representing the tempo of weight transference during the reeling. During the dancing turnings those dancers who performed the back step (i.e. placing one foot behind the other and hopping on it once before repeating the process with the other foot) did it in time to the quaver pulse and all dancers marked the end of the dancing turning with three quaver stamps beginning on the first beat of the last bar of the turning (RLR) before either repeating the dancing or moving off again in crotchet tempo into the 'reeling turn'. Many older informants have commented on how well old men used to dance Shetland reels, each man often having his favourite tune for dancing and each marking the individual rhythms of the dancing turning with his own individual pattern of dance steps.

Such dancing is clearly related to step-, tap- and clog-dancing styles of other parts of the British Isles and (in particular) Cape Breton and other parts of the Americas. But in most cases outside Shetland these styles survive more as solo spectacles (e.g. Highland dancing) rather than as part of social dance; for feats of athleticism, shown in this case through the lively footwork, are no longer an important feature of dancing in the U.K. outside Shetland.

Rhythm seems to be all important to both fiddlers and dancers. The internal rhythm of a tune is contained both in its metrical duration patterns and its melodic accent. Such differences are enhanced by the best fiddlers and realised in varied movement accentual gesture by the best dancers. John Henderson (son of the late Willy B. Henderson of Gloup) emphasised the importance of the bow arm in producing the desired rhythmic effect:-

"Unless you can play the fiddle wi' a lilt in til it, then that was no use even grappling a bow - it's the bowing and lilt that [makes] you feel like dancing."

(Quoting from a relative, SA/1980/10)

Other recorded accounts point out the attitude of older dancers also to the desired rhythmic quality. For example:-

Harry Tulloch (late of Bressay Island):

"I remember me playing one night and I had another fellow accompanying me on the guitar, old Willy Robertson .... was doing a bit of dancing on his own - but we played one tune. 'No no mun!' he says, 'Stop, stop - I canna hear the fiddle.' You see, he couldna hear the tune for this - thump thump. He wis wanting jest the straight tune of the fiddle and he hed this vamping at the back o' him and it put him off. He's been used to the true rhythm of the tune. That's why there wis so much needit in the bowin o' da Shetland tune - because they were listening to that you see - to get the stepping."

(SA/1972/116/5)

Nowadays, Harry complained, the accompaniments provided all 'the beat' and the rhythm of the tune does not matter any more.

John Henderson's use of the term 'lilt' deserves some discussion. It seems to have a specialised meaning in Shetland and, for many informants, it pertains to the rhythmic flow of the melody. Though the running notes in reels may frequently be notated as equal quavers or (as with the examples in this thesis) in semiquavers, they are rarely equal in duration. Relative proportions between pairs of

notes are often 4:3 or 5:3, occasionally even 2:1. Most frequently, as in bars 5 and 6 of Ex. 38 the first of each pair is the longer, though when three notes are played with one bow the middle note - and first of a pair - is often shortened, though accented also. It is such variation in the micro-rhythmic structure of the tune, combined with variation in dynamic accents achieved with the bow, that make for good performances - playing that makes Shetlanders 'feel like dancing'. The particular type of lilt used in Shetland is one of the ingredients that mark it out from Scottish and Irish fiddling, for today at least the micro-rhythmic structure of reels in Scottish music is far more even and in Irish fiddling more consistently composed of long-short 4:3 or 5:3 combinations. In the best Shetland fiddling it is more varied than either of these and this is well illustrated in the playing of William Hunter, Senr., whose playing was highly regarded for its lilting quality, for his 'fine bow haund'. Ex. 38 is a transcription of his playing of the reel Jack Broke the Prison Door. The music stave gives the tune as it might be transcribed with some of the shorter semiquavers indicated by an extra slash through the tails. But the time values are more precisely indicated in the second line (a pitch graph) and <sup>also in</sup> the bottom line (the spectral envelope) with vertical lines being added to show the approximate boundaries between notes. These graphs were produced with the help of electro-chymography carried out in the laboratory of the Department of Linguistics of Edinburgh University. Note that the pitch graph is offset slightly to the right of the spectral envelope due to a delay unavoidably built into the electronic process. The great variety in note length that gives his playing such 'lilt' is more clearly and precisely indicated than is possible in any standard musical transcription.



The word 'lift' is another term used to describe an affective quality in fiddle playing and is sometimes confused with 'lilt'. 'Lift' however, according to most players, is to do with rhythmic vitality - with tempo (too slow a tempo would make it hard to achieve 'lift') and with accentuation. Good lift is a quality required from accompanists. For instance the bass line (whether provided by pianists or bass players) is expected to be firm, absolutely in tempo and fairly staccato. As we have seen in some earlier testimonies, younger fiddlers enjoyed accompaniments for the very reason that they added 'lift' to their performances and made their own task easier. Older players had to maintain 'lift' by themselves. Of Bobbie Jamieson's playing, his grandson, Gordon, remarked:-

"Now he had probably what I would describe as lilt and they [he and his partner, Willy B. Henderson] played on the fast side which gie'd it a peerie bit of lift as well.... they started off a tune as if they were winding themselves up." (i.e. accelerated over a couple of bars until they reached the right tempo.) (SA/1980/15)

Investigating these two concepts 'lift' and 'lilt' proved a difficult task. They are affective qualities in the music and Shetlanders respond to their presence in shared feelings and in dance: there is little need to verbalise about two qualities that they all feel. This problem is discussed in an earlier paper (Cooke, 1981) where I have noted that when asked, for example, what was meant by the term 'lift':-

"Informants either referred to the examples on my tape and said 'that has good lift' or they referred to the playing style of a particular fiddler known to me and said 'he plays with good lift' or they resorted to gestures, commonly beginning, after a long pause, with 'well, it's very difficult to explain, it's a kind of .....[gesture]."

(Cooke, 1981, p. 49-50)

Many fiddlers took the sensible way out and simply picked up their fiddles to demonstrate the difference between playing with and without 'lift'.

Most older fiddlers remarked on the need to play not only rhythmically but also strongly because of the noise that the dancers made with their heavy footwear, their heuching and the general chatter of the non-dancing participants. It was for this reason as much as any that they often played on two strings, making the fiddle ring out with maximum sound for as long as possible. The dancing turnings always produced more noise from the dancers than the reeling turns and this possibly is one reason why the second turning of most reels is usually in a higher register than the first turning and nearly always makes great use of the highest string. But it should also be added that the dancing turning is the more exciting section of the dance and one would expect this to be reflected in a correspondingly higher level of musical excitement - hence possibly a higher register.

#### TONALITY

Turning now from the dance context of the music to the constraints and potential of the instrument itself, it appears that in Shetland the tonality of the music is very much conditioned by the instrument. With the exception of a few modern reels all the Shetland dance repertory is played in 'first' position and forward or backward extensions of first and third fingers to produce extra pitches are rare. The fourth finger was also never used by older fiddlers<sup>1</sup>, so the pitch repertory available to older fiddlers using the fiddle tuned to the 'standard' tuning was as follows:-



1. Many older fiddlers (for example Andrew Poleson (see photo p.56)), held their fiddles along their arms against the chest. Position shifts and the use of the 4th finger were impracticable with this type of hold.

This explains the differences between the Shetland tune Scalloway Lasses and the Scottish Fairfield House <sup>which were</sup> discussed in chapter 3. Notice that a choice of three positions is given for the second finger on each string. The middle position produces the interval that is often called the 'neutral third' (from the open string pitch). Patrick Shuldham-Shaw in his brief but informative comment on Shetland fiddle playing style observed:-

"The third and seventh degrees of the scale are often neither flat nor sharp but somewhere between the two, though in these cases I usually found that the player had a very definite impression of the tune being major or minor in flavour. This I found by playing back the tunes after noting them, on a keyboard instrument, with both major and minor intervals, and the player invariably decided that one version was right and the other wrong."

(Shuldham-Shaw, op. cit. 1947, p. 76)

This explanation implies that there was a difference between the musical intentions of the fiddlers and what they actually performed. But, in giving his musicians an either/or choice, Shuldham-Shaw was apparently turning his back on the possibility that the players meant what they played and that 'neutral' intervals could feature in the Shetland modal system. The question of a neutral mode has for long fascinated and baffled British and Scandinavian musicologists, at least from the time when Percy Grainger suggested the existence of 'one single loosely-knit modal folk-song scale' that was neither mixolydian, dorian nor aeolian (Grainger, 1908-9, p. 158). It is interesting (because of Shetland's cultural contacts with Norway) that the most recent and thorough investigation into neutral tones comes from a Norwegian scholar, Reidar Sevåg, an organologist specialising in the study of Scandinavian instruments. In his article 'Neutral Tones and the Problem of Mode in Norwegian Folk Music' he summarises past theories and, as a result of his work with old langeleiks (narrow zithers with fretted finger boards) proposes that an older modal system once existed in rural Norway based on a quality

which he calls 'anhemitonic heptatonism' (Sevåg, 1974, pp. 207-213). The positioning of the frets on old langeleiks were vital evidence in Sevåg's research and, unlike more modern instruments, none of them allowed for semitone steps. He found instead a variety of combinations of whole tones and smaller intervals - none smaller than 'a somewhat short three-quarter tone' - within a fixed framework of tonic, fifth and octave. Such intervals certainly feature in the fiddle music of Shetland, but only in the case of the older fiddlers and, even then, it appears that during this century fiddle intonation has been changing fast. Thus some fiddlers, notably Andrew Poleson of Whalsay, made use of C natural, C sharp and neutral C's, depending on the tonality of the reel, while others use only diatonic intonation.

Of the possible 'keys' usable from such a set of available pitches, the 'fiddle keys' of D (37%) and G (26%) are most common for the Shetland reels listed in Appendix 3. Of the reels with a subjective tonic of A (25%) some are clearly in a major tonality, often with alternating sections in G, which suggests Scottish (possibly bagpipe) influences. For instance, the Unst tune, Hadd dee Tongue, Bonnie Lass (Ex. 39) is very reminiscent in its tonal structure of the well-known Scottish Reel of Tulloch (ex.39a). Other A-mode tunes are more problematic and it is here that neutral tones commonly occur, especially in the case of a number of A tunes collected in Whalsay.

The strongly pentatonic nature of many of the tunes has already been mentioned. This may be one reason why writers have suggested that Shetland music has an Irish flavour (see for example, Shulldham-Shaw, 1947, p. 79). But, as fig. 4 shows, the frequent



Fig. 4



occurrence of pentatonic phrases may be as much a result of preferred finger patterns as anything else. In terms of ergonomics, fingers 1 and 3 operate easily in succession; fingers 1 and 2 less well, and fingers 2 and 3 even less well. Motifs using fingers 1 and 3 in conjunction with open strings abound throughout the repertory. Often, as in the case of The Merry Boys of Greenland (Ex. 40) such pentatonic patterns alternate with motifs employing the second finger and open strings to produce tunes analysable as hexatonic or heptatonic (in bar 4, older fiddlers invariably play neutral g" and c"). We are left speculating whether or not such finger patterns result from a deep-rooted affinity for pentatonic structures or whether bio-mechanical factors are stronger.

A possible explanation may be found through an examination of the essential 'harmonicity' of the tunes, remembering that older fiddlers made much greater use of double string sounds than today's players. Assuming that Shetlanders traditionally have concepts of consonance and dissonance similar to those of other western Europeans in (for instance) the 18th century, one might expect melodic structures to be composed with an ear for the harmonies that arise (on accented beats) from the combination of melody notes and different drone pitches. This often seems to be the case as, for instance, in


the second turning of Da Forefit o' Da Ship, (Ex. 41). There are problems in examining this theory in detail, however. Firstly, the fiddler has always a choice of drones (either above or below the melody notes) which greatly increases his choice of 'chords' and, secondly, we do not always know what the open strings may have been tuned to when a particular variant took shape. For instance, in north Yell the 'high bass' tuning (e"-a'-d'-a) is used more frequently than elsewhere so that low A rather than low G is used as the lowest drone. Yet many items in the north Yell repertory of 'high bass' tunes are played with 'low bass' elsewhere in Shetland. Naturally players dislike retuning their fiddles to different tunings and tend to stay in one tuning pattern for as long as possible and so make their repertory fit the tuning. One is quite likely then to find examples where tunes more suitable to one tuning are played in another.

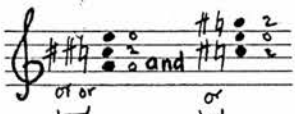
#### PHRASE STRUCTURE

An examination of 43 of the most popular Shetland reels (all the reels published in Da Mirrie Dancers and Haand Me Doon da Fiddle) showed that in general they were very economical in the use of musical ideas. Exx. 53 and 53a give a representative sample of reels showing the phrase structure of each. The melodies are mostly analysable into one-bar phrases (allowing for frequent use of anacrusis) with rarely more than four or five different phrases in each tune. In the 16-bar tunes, which consist of two halves each of four bars which are repeated, and which are the most common type of reel, one finds the following common structures:-

	: a b a c	:  :	d d' d c:		(e.g. no. 2)
and	: a a' a b	:  :	c c d b :		(e.g. no. 7).

The ends of both halves rhyme in over 90% of the tunes - a feature which is however not restricted to the Shetland repertory but is found in the dance music of other parts of the British Isles. In many tunes the one-bar phrases contrast alternately in terms of 'harmonic' structure. Thus in tunes in the 'key' of D one finds

broken arpeggio motifs based on  alternating

with others based on  (e.g. in nos. 5, 6 and -

at half-bar intervals in no.7). Earlier I suggested that these contrasts may arise from the fact that they are easily fingered harmonic patterns where playing on two strings simultaneously is a common practice and this feature suggests links with the Muckle or Aald reels whose structure was examined briefly in Chapter 2.

Often all or part of the first phrase (a) is developed by repetition of a motif, or by inverting parts of it (see nos. 3 and 4). A few reels have a more song-like quality and dividing them into one-bar sections makes less sense (e.g. nos. 10 and 11). Shetland jigs, a much smaller part of the indigenous repertory, tend to show the same degree of rhyme at the ends of turnings.

#### PERFORMANCE STYLE AND REGIONAL VARIATION

Though the title of this chapter suggests that it is possible to discuss and describe basic musical style apart from performance style, it must already be clear that this is not very feasible, for individual performance style can affect musical structure



considerably. A striking example of this is found in comparing the opening part of two variants of the reel known most commonly by the title Sleep Soond i Da Moarnin. In Ex. 42 Tom Anderson's setting (Anderson and Swing, No. 14), favoured by most younger fiddlers possibly because it was popularised by the Shetland Fiddle Society Band, is shown alongside the version played by two older fiddlers from Cullivoe, North Yell. The differences are marked but suggest that similarity of rhythmic and general harmonic structure are more important than tonality and melodic identity. In the second bar of the first turning the differences arise possibly because the Cullivoe players favour the E string as a drone and the progression f#" - e" - c#" - a' - b' - c#" accords well with this drone. Older players in other districts (for example, Andrew Poleson of Whalsay) have versions more like the Anderson setting at this point and sometimes touch the open G string on the second beat of bar 2. This neatly underlines the problem mentioned earlier - that of deciding how far the use of drones affects melodic structure. In the second turning the Anderson setting uses the 'darker' minor third (c" natural) as opposed to the Cullivoe 'lighter' version with the major third (c#"). However, a version by Andrew Poleson uses the neutral c" throughout the second turning. It seems likely that in this case the neutral mode was the older version but that the two versions shown here have crystallised in more modern times, one major and the other minor. A similar example is the reel Da Boanie Isle o' Whalsay. The two early written sources (Hoseason and Johnston) presented the tune in A minor (see Ex. 25). Older players in Whalsay played it in a neutral tonality while elsewhere it is played unambiguously in A major.

Fiddlers' biographies (ch.2) suggested that unaccompanied fiddling persisted longer in Whalsay than elsewhere, where it seems

that the introduction of diatonic accompanying instruments has <sup>only recently</sup> forced the players to avoid neutral tones as being 'out of tune' and to opt for major or minor - just as in the case of those informants tested by Shuldham-Shaw.

## REGIONAL STYLES

The differences pointed to in the case of Sleep Soond in da Moarning are not, however, just the result of purely idiosyncratic variation within a thriving oral tradition, for Shetlanders themselves perceive traditional differences in performance style between the different communities. Ali Bain (a Shetlander who is the fiddler in the professional 'folk' group, The Boys of the Lough) has drawn a parallel between the different speech dialects observable in Shetland and different fiddle styles (BBC broadcast, November 11, 1981). Earlier the testimony of Willie B. Henderson of Gloop was quoted concerning his teacher, Bruce Danielson, who could play in so many different styles (pp. 67-68). Illustrating the differences between such styles on paper is not easy. Even fairly detailed music transcriptions throw up only the more obvious details, such as variations in the degree to which two or more strings are played on simultaneously, differences in bowing and differences in tempo and preferred tunings. A fourth difference - in rhythmic details, including accentuation - is possibly one of the most important differences, but is not exposed in the normal transcription. Here I have had to resort to machine transcriptions to expose such differences, as already in the case of Willie Hunter Senr.'s performance of Jack Broke the Prison Door (Ex. 38).

1). Mainland Shetland

Unlike the smaller islands where there has been considerable homogeneity of style within each community, Mainland Shetland presents a different picture. Improvement in roads has enabled Shetlanders to get into Lerwick more frequently and, since the 1950s, to mix in the Shetland Folk Society band and this, combined with considerable depopulation in areas such as Delting and North Mavine for example, has radically weakened what distinctive homogeneity there may have been within different communities. Shetlanders have pointed to Henry Thomson (formerly of Vidlin) as a prime exponent of what they have described as the Vidlin style. However, during the period of my field work he was the only fiddler whom I met from Vidlin. He himself remarked that in his young days there were many fiddlers in the area but that they all played in different styles (SA/1970/279), but he was probably commenting on idiosyncratic variation and possibly also including fiddlers who spent their formative years outside his home district. His own playing shows similarities with that of Bobbie Peterson, whose home is about twentymiles further south in Tingwall parish, and it is also similar to that of George Sutherland, a fiddler who lives in Bressay, but whose father came from Delting parish just to the west of Vidlin. Features of this style as represented by the first two fiddlers are:- the occasional use of double stops (mostly thirds produced by fingers 1 and 3) in addition to the deliberate use of open strings to produce harmony in selected places; notes in passages of semiquavers tend to be more equal in duration than is the case in islands further north; and a relatively fast tempo (in the case of Bobbie Peterson =108) which, together with semiquaver scrubbing at points where other fiddlers might use a long 'draa', contributes to a busy and energetic sound. Players tend to use the middle to upper

half of the bow and to play with a flexible wrist and a mixture of both upper and lower arm movement. The use of clean accents (especially on the lower strings) combined with the bowing on two strings often creates the effect of two voice parts (e.g. the opening of Henry Thomson's Put Hame Da Borraed Claes and in Bobbie Peterson's Wullafjord, bars 9,11,12 and 13 (see examples 43 and 44). George Sutherland's playing, while rhythmically very similar, is more relaxed in that his tempi are marginally slower ( $\text{♩}$ =106-108) and he tends to slur more. However, this is probably an idiosyncratic quality and the relationship between his playing and that of the other two can still be heard even when one compares the two highly personal renderings of the opening section of the popular East Neuk of Fife (examples 45 and 46) which on paper look so very different.

Other older mainland musicians have less in common with each other and we have little evidence with which to answer the question of how representative the playing of other fiddlers (for example Peter Fraser of Finnigirth in the Walls district) was of their areas. The picture is further confused by the eclectic influence of Tom Anderson, who through his work as leader of the Shetland Folk Society Fiddle Band and, to a lesser extent, his later work as instrumental teacher in local authority schools throughout Shetland, must have contributed towards the mingling of Mainland styles into one general style. In other islands the picture is different. North Yell, Unst and Whalsay will each be considered in turn.

## 2). Fiddle style in Yell

The comments that follow are based on features in the fiddling of Willie B. Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson, who were the 'Hall'

fiddlers in Cullivoe, North Yell, for a good part of the period between the two world wars and for a short time afterwards. It has been noted that both learned from Bruce Danielson. Their playing is considered to be typical of the community style and the style is still prevalent among younger fiddlers in Cullivoe. During my fieldwork period both Willie Henderson and Bobbie Jamieson were still playing, though by then they were in their 70s and 80s respectively. My own interest in their playing contributed to a revival of a Cullivoe Traditional Fiddle Band whose members accepted the two older men as their leaders.

Certain features of their style have already been mentioned. These are the almost continuous use of drone accompaniments on open strings both above and below the melody line and the frequent use of 'high bass' tuning (e" a' d' a). They used fairly short strokes in the middle of the upper half of the bow, working mostly with the forearm, the wrist joint being somewhat inflexible, and played mostly over the end of the fingerboard. This meant that accents were not as bold as those of the Mainland fiddlers. The two distinctive exceptions to the above are firstly when players employ the long draa on open strings at the ends of phrases (from the middle of the bow to the point) and the occasional down bow accents (on off-beat quavers) that follow three slurred semiquavers (or the equivalent) with the up bow. The draa is invariably made on the two bottom strings and both are left ringing away as the next section is attacked. Ex. 47 shows this clearly in Bobbie Jamieson's treatment of the reel, Soldier's Joy. Notice also in this example how the player's frequent habit of sounding the upper open string leads to his beginning the tune a perfect fifth higher as he fingers both E and A strings simultaneously before descending to the register of the A and D

strings. His companion, W. Henderson, also did this regularly and one is less conscious of the melody than of driving drone harmonies.

Some fiddlers maintain<sup>that</sup> the 'long draa' was once common in other parts of Shetland and that its function, apart from cueing the ends of sections, was to give the left hand fingers and the bow arm a brief chance to relax. Many 'hall' fiddlers found themselves being required to play strongly and rhythmically for many hours at a stretch, and so any device that allowed for a temporary relaxation during a dance would have been welcomed. The long draa is now less commonly used outside Yell though it is evident, for example, in the playing of George Sutherland (see Ex. 48). Though the transcription of Bobbie Jamieson's Soldier's Joy conveys a number of the stylistic features that make the North Yell style so different from others it cannot adequately show, however, the extent to which the players make use of notes inegales: semiquavers in this style are more unequal than anywhere else in Shetland, the continuously lilting flow of melody being a conspicuous feature of their style in spite of the rather fast tempo (average  $\text{♩} = 110-112$ ).

### 3). Unst and Fetlar

These two islands have seen the use of vamping instruments for longer than in Yell and consequently players in both these islands make less use of fiddle harmony. Older players in Unst tend to slur fewer notes together in one bow. A sturdy, heavier style is enhanced by a tendency to accent both up and down beats (quavers) and by the fact that one or other turning of many tunes indigenous to Unst exploit the lower strings (Ex. 49). Gilbert Gray's style is possibly not typical of the Unst style, though he was that island's best known

exponent of traditional fiddling during my period of field work. Film record shows him using a more flexible wrist, using the middle of the upper half of the bow and only returning to the middle of the bow for occasional strong down bows. He tends to slur pairs of semiquavers more than other Unst fiddlers (the playing of Jimmy Johnston and John Stickle were used for comparison) but, like them all, he manages equally strong accents on up bows as on down strokes.

Fetlar playing has not been examined in much detail as only two fiddlers have been recorded. It gives the impression of being less strongly accented than that of Unst and more flowing like the North Yell style, but without the ringing harmonies of the latter and with a less degree of 'lilt'.

#### 4). Whalsay

There is remarkable homogeneity of style among the older fiddlers of this island, despite the fact that Andrew Poleson of Symbister, my principal informant, could perceive differences between the style of players from the west side of the island (which is only three miles wide) and those from the small community at Isbister on the east coast. Ex. 50 typifies the Whalsay style. Tempo is generally fast (though Andrew Poleson was playing more slowly when I was working in the island) and the music sounds vigorous and strongly accented, the latter being produced by a mixture of down bow jerks and sharp staccato up bows spiced with frequent use of 'shivers' (one or two rapid repetitions of a note produced by a succession of very short bow changes - in effect 'rebound' notes after a stopped accent: (e.g. in bar 1). The almost complete absence of slurring in many tunes contributes to the staccato rhythms. Notice how the occasional



slurring of two notes (rather than the more common three) produces passages of what in Scotland is called 'back' bowing where up-bows occur on the main beats. Another striking feature of the Whalsay style is the occasional hesitation in tempo, often produced by pauses on open string up-bow recoveries. Sound quality is bright and hard. Andrew Poleson, whose playing is among that filmed for study, held his fiddle against his chest rather than wedged under his chin and his bowing consisted of mostly whole arm movement with the elbow and wrist being stiffly set. He played entirely in the upper half of his bow after the initial note. The rapid energetic bow changing is paralleled in the dancing of Whalsay men as they perform the rapid 'shuffle' steps in the dancing turning of Shetland reels.

Whalsay fiddlers had a large repertory of reels (Andrew Poleson recorded more than 80 for me during the period 1970-76) and though many of them were rarely known elsewhere in Shetland a large number appear to be of Scottish origin. Very many of the titles and some of the tunes are the same as Scottish song airs and reels popular in the early 18th century in mainland Scotland (e.g. Sandie o'er the lea, Up and Waur them aa, Jumping Joan, Ladies Briest Knots, Timber Stairs, The Sailor's Wife, Gold for the Bonnie Lasses, Fairly Shot of Her, Jenny Nettles, I hae a Wife o my ain, etc.).

Earlier (p.52) we learned that a certain John Newbiggin, a Scot from Peeblesshire, had come to the island in the mid-19th century, bringing a number of tunes with him. He came to work for the Bruce family - one of the most powerful Scottish families to come to Shetland - whose main house and farm were on the hill overlooking Symbister harbour in Whalsay. The distinctive features of Whalsay fiddle style possibly owe something to an early Scottish influence

that must have been stronger there than elsewhere in Shetland. But since we know so little about social - as opposed to economic - relationships between lairds, their officials and the Shetland peasantry, it is difficult to follow this line of enquiry further. But Whalsay, because it is so small and relatively compact, favours a situation where a small number of incoming musicians could affect the fiddle repertory and style of the men of the island. Certainly the style of older fiddlers there is less like that of any other part of Shetland. But it is also very unlike the common present-day fiddle style of mainland Scotland.

#### CONCLUSION

Words are, of course, an inadequate medium for describing details of musical style, especially details of performance style. Nor do transcriptions always serve the purpose adequately. All the above styles are exemplified on the disc, Shetland Fiddle Music (TNMG 117) and the differences alluded to are more easily perceived there. The hardest problem has been to point to differences in the degree of 'lilt' used by fiddlers, i.e. to display details of the microrhythmic structure of performances. The electro-mechanically produced melograph shown earlier (Ex. 38) was useful in illustrating this quality in the cleanly bowed playing of William Hunter Senr., but this technique of analysis is not a great help when some other styles are examined. In the case of the Cullivoe fiddlers for example, the continuous ringing of open strings tends to mask bow changes and accents, making it very difficult to delimit the boundaries between notes. For instance, the playing of Willie B. Henderson of Cullivoe is contrasted with that of George Sutherland in Exx. 51 and 52. In the absence of more sophisticated techniques one has to rely on aural

perception. This should be no real hardship, after all, it was Shetlanders who directed my attention to the question of lilt and they had only their ears to help them! It was clear, however, that the degree and variety of 'lilt' in their playing were important features in what they called the special 'flavour' of Shetland fiddle playing.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CHANGE IN RECENT YEARS - FUNCTION AND AESTHETICS.

Oh man, Tammy, dis is vexin  
Hearing whit du has to say  
Boy, I tink du'll tak da fiddle -  
I wid laek to hear dee play  
As du played at rants ahd haemfirs  
Mony a time afore dis day

Yon's "Da Mirrie Boys o Greenland",  
Bit da Greenland men is geen;  
"Underhill" fae first I heard him,  
Mony a heavy day A'm seen.  
Whin du plays "Auld Swarra" ta me  
Boy, da taers comes ta me een.

Mind's du, whin we baith wir younger,  
Fou I used ta sit and look  
At da muckle yatlin kyettie  
Hingin rampin ida crook.  
And du played dy lichtsome skyinbows  
Inbee at da chimnley-neuk.

Dat's aa geen noo....."

from "A Skyinbow o Tammy's", The  
Collected Poems of Vagaland  
[T.A.Robertson], Lerwick, 1975.

Many of the early accounts quoted in chapter 1 suggest that the fiddlers' music was savoured and enjoyed not only for dancing but also as 'chamber music' that was enjoyed by all. The listening music of the fiddlers consisted for the main part of the same diminutive dance forms, but Shetlanders with a keen ear for detail relished the finer points of such performances as much as city audiences might enjoy the string quartets of Haydn. One man whose playing always moved those who heard him was William Hunter, senr., a native of Bellister in the Nesting district of Mainland Shetland, but who moved to Lerwick and became one of the founder members of the Shetland Folk

Society Fiddle Band. His name came often to the lips of Mainland Shetlanders when asked whose playing among that of the older generation of fiddlers they enjoyed in particular. They gave as their reasons the way he could shape phrases with his bow, making them lilt along so sweetly, and it was clear that for many the whole art lay in the fiddlers' individual phrasing of their versions of these short pieces, even though they were rendered at a spritely dance tempo. Two fiddler friends from Bressay explained:-

"And the Shetland reel of course, it's the same; the reel was built for the balance of the dance. The secret was the rhythm you see - the life that the bowin' could put into it."

(George Sutherland and Harry Tulloch, SA/1972/115)

Later in the same evening Harry Tulloch added:-

"There were no other amusements then in the winter nights you see. We hed an old fellow comin along playing twa-three old Shetland tunes. We wis jest bairns, we just sat and listened to that as it'd been the very finest music. There were nothing else you see; no wireless, no TV, no records..... or very few records."

Such statements remind one of those notes that Laurence Williamson made in his diary some fifty years earlier:-

"A whole family would even shut up the house and go miles away where their relations stayed. And in the long winter evenings the fiddler would play to the children around the fire."

(L. Johnson, op. cit., p.125).

Some of the tunes were said earlier to have programmatic content. A glance at the titles in Appendix 3 shows a good number of references to fishing and sailing situations (Da Fore<sup>^</sup>fit o da ship, Aandowin at da bow, Head her in for Bastavoe, Square da Mizzen, Muckle a Skerry in three (a fishing mead etc.) and references to the fair sex. Several informants have pointed out features in tunes that to them represent ideas suggested by the titles. Sail her Ower Da Raft Trees is a good example, on which Dr. Tom Anderson comments in his

Haand Me Doon Da Fiddle (see Ex. 52); and other fiddlers have also commented on how the upward surge of melody from the low G in bar 4 conveys the feeling of a boat's hull being lifted from astern as a big swell overtakes the vessel. But in many cases no meaning may be ascribed to the musical content of the tune - the title merely serving to trigger off appropriate images or to cause one to recollect situations familiar to the listeners present.

When dance tunes are played as listening music the urge to dance - the usual affective response - is internalised by the audience. Nevertheless the playing, as John Henderson pointed out must still make one 'feel like dancing', in this respect the same criteria would seem to apply whether one is actually dancing to the music or sitting down at the fireside listening to it - for one is still dancing - internally. There is the difference however that the fiddler no longer has to play as strongly as when numerous dancers are on the floor of a village hall; his tone is easily heard and accordingly listeners now have the opportunity to listen to the quality of sound produced.

In the past then though the fiddler has had a dual role to play there has not been a great difference between the two roles, those of providing music for friends to dance to and providing music for listening. But as long as the fiddler himself fulfilled both roles there would be little difference in the kind of sound he produced or in the expectations of his audience. But the situation now has changed. Dance bands provide the music for dancing and the accordionist is the leader in both social and musical roles within the band. Though a number of more able young fiddlers still play for dancing in bands, the kind of musical satisfaction obtained from

playing with an accordionist in his ensemble is different from that gained as one plays solo or to discreet piano or guitar accompaniment. Playing in the band gives a degree of social satisfaction ("having a tune with the boys") as well as monetary reward and it constantly extends the fiddlers' fingering technique, since many accordionists are partial to "the flat keys" and fast intricate passage work, and are constantly expanding their repertory. However, most band fiddlers of today are aware that their own sound is largely masked by the accordionist.

If the accordionist has ousted the fiddler from his primary role in the dance situation, so also the availability of radio, television, records and cassettes made the fiddler less necessary in the domestic context. Apart from the band fiddlers then, the majority of fiddlers play now almost solely for domestic entertainment - the balance between the two roles they traditionally played has changed. It follows that their playing style is likely to change also. Furthermore, the music heard through the mass media is so often not of Shetland and this is yet another factor that contributes to a new set of aesthetic values. The strong, hard sound of many older traditional fiddlers is often no longer enjoyed by younger Shetlanders because of its 'scratchy' tone and the fiddlers' use of so much open string and variable-drone harmony, for <sup>younger Shetlanders</sup> have probably never danced to the unaccompanied fiddlers and so have had no appreciation of the situation that made that type of tone so desirable and necessary. In the confines of the home such a strong sound is undesirable in any case.

Just as Da Blin Fiddler, George Stark, made a great impression on those fiddlers who had the chance to hear him playing in the



Lerwick streets during the period between the two world wars, so in the 70's the playing of Scottish fiddlers like the late Hector MacAndrew (the doyen of Scots fiddlers who had received a classical violinist's training in addition to the traditional style of his father), Angus Cameron (of Kirriemuir) and Angus Fitchett (of Dundee), as well as Irish musicians like Sean MacGuire, is available to Shetlanders at the push of a button.

It is not surprising then if many Shetlanders will refer to William Hunter, junr. as an example of the supreme Shetland fiddler of the day. "Young Willie" as he is still affectionately called (though now, 1982, in his late forties) learned initially from the fiddling of his father, later from two classically trained violinists, Gideon Stove and Mr. Makardo. But according to one Shetlander (his fiddler and composer friend, Frank Jamieson) he always preferred to "have a tune with the boys" and turned his back on the opportunity for a professional violinist's training. His favourite fiddler (for playing) is Angus Fitchett. He combines with great talent his father's flair for bowing and his virile yet finely shaped phrasing with the tone production, including the use of vibrato, of a classical violinist. He makes expert use of higher positions especially when playing slow airs, for to a small repertory of traditional Shetland dance tunes he has added slow airs in Scottish style, strathspeys, pipe marches, Irish and north American fiddle pieces and even light classical pieces such as Monti's Czardas. His playing is taken as a model by many younger Shetland musicians and his brief appearances at meetings of the recently formed Lerwick Accordion and Fiddle Club are usually regarded as high spots of the evening.

Another Shetland musician who has successfully absorbed and



The late Alec Leask - violin maker  
Lerwick (c.1974 - photo J. Manners)



Trevor Hunter (centre) with other members of  
The Forty Fiddlers (photo Paule Epstein) (1979).

combined violinistic and Scottish styles is Arthur Scott Robertson who in 1969 won the BBC National Scottish Fiddle competition. He frequently visited the late Hector MacAndrew in Aberdeen in order to put the finishing touches to his playing of Scottish strathspeys, pipe-style marches and slow airs. Along with Tom Anderson, who is more determinedly traditional in outlook and style, these two players are exerting considerable influence on the development of younger players, though Arthur Robertson is less influential because of his apparent lack of interest in the traditional Shetland repertory and

Among the younger players is Trevor Hunter, a former pupil of Tom Anderson. He has taken over some of the work from his teacher as the itinerant fiddle teacher working for the Shetland Education Authority around the island schools. He reads music fluently, has an excellent grasp of Scottish tunes and styles, as well as traditional and modern Shetland pieces, and plays with a 'classical' tone when needed and with well-controlled vibrato. His intonation, like that of 'young' Willie Hunter, might be described as 'modern diatonic' insofar as none of the older style 'neutral' intervals are to be heard in his playing. This absence was commented on by a visiting Norwegian traditional musician, Knut Buen, an acknowledged exponent of the hardingfele style, who lives in Telemark.

In his tradition older intonations are regarded as important and fiddlers make every effort to preserve them. The hardingfele tradition is a solo style and deliberately conservative and in such an environment it is easier to preserve an older style than where fiddlers play to the accompaniment of equal-tempered instruments such as guitar and piano. Having heard recordings of old-style Shetlanders, Knut Buen expected Shetland Folk Society musicians to

share his concern for the preservation of older intonation.

In 1980 Trevor Hunter took over from Tom Anderson as leader of the Fiddlers' Society. Both here and in his teaching work he is contributing greatly to the production of a new and very different generation of Shetland fiddlers. Interestingly, some 60% of his pupils are girls, while in Tom Anderson's case the proportion is <sup>as high as</sup> 90%. Prior to this, women fiddlers were comparatively rare in Shetland. Presumably women in Shetland have traditionally been too busy with domestic tasks to be able to find the time to become good fiddlers. In the early 1970s the only women in the Folk Society band were the accompanist and the string bass player. Earlier in the century a Miss Jean Pole was reputedly a capable fiddler, but during my early fieldwork years I met only one woman who played (Pat Sutherland of Uyeasound, Unst). All this has changed during the past 10 years and it is possible that within the next decade women fiddlers will outnumber men in Shetland unless traditional domestic division of labour persists, causing young women to give up playing once they become housewives.

Virtually all fiddlers today prefer to have an accompanist - the piano or acoustic guitar being preferred to electronic instruments. Consequently they are inhibited from using variable drones and other types of harmony favoured by 'auld Shetland' fiddlers, but occasionally include double stops at cadences and other structurally important points in the pieces. Furthermore most young players are conscious of and strive to make use of vibrato.

Looking again at some of the newly composed material - often labelled as being in 'new Shetland' style by Shetlanders themselves -

one notes some important innovations, the most important being in the relationship between melody and accompaniment. Some pieces, particularly those of Tom Anderson, contain modulations (usually only in the second turning of the tunes, which take one briefly into the dominant (or relative major in the case of minor key tunes). Whether they modulate or not, it is clear from the content of the tunes that players and composers now think in terms of functional triadic harmonies. Frank Jamieson's Leveneep Head (ex.16) composed in the late 1960s, illustrates this well. For some this harmonic consideration is conscious and deliberate, but for most fiddler-composers it is probably unconscious. Most fiddlers are content to prescribe the tune only and leave it to accompanists to select appropriate harmonies, for, as Frank Jamieson put it, "I don't know anything about chords." (SA/1980/18). On the other hand, accordionist composers whose tunes are also played by fiddlers, tend to specify harmonies for their tunes even if performers may not follow their direction.

The nature of the accordion - with its ranks of buttons under the left hand for providing chords and bass notes - causes accordionists to think continually in terms of harmony as well as melody. A radical notion has appeared in recent years with regard to harmony in that some accordionists consider that the choice of harmony is sometimes crucial to the success of a tune. Gordon Jamieson, leader of the trio known as the Cullivoe Band, feels this:-

"The thing that annoys me is - on a couple of records.... I've got a couple of tunes which I composed. Now on one of these records which is just coming out one is a tune which I composed after Anne [his wife] - Mistress Anne Jamieson. Now the chords in that tune makes that tune. That's how we decided it - because when you decide to write a tune you don't just write the notes, you write the backing as well - that's how I think about it....

P.C. The harmony is an essential part of the tune is it?

G.J. Definitely! If we're doing a tune on B flat and we can put in a D chord into G minor that makes the tune a wee bit more sparky.....that's a wee bit brighter."

(SA/1980/13)

This regard for the importance of harmony, which is developing similarly in mainland Scotland, constitutes a new development. Accordionist-composers in particular have tended to move ahead of the tastes of their audiences and feel some degree of alienation as a result. If audiences in the more traditional Shetland communities consider harmony at all, they are content with the simpler triadic schemes (chords I, IV and V) or even the older variable drones. Harmonic innovations meet with little positive response, which often disappoints the innovator. Gordon Jamieson, for example, feels that he is addressing two different audiences; the 'punters' who most enjoy dancing to the music and who have little interest in harmonic content and new tunes as long as the rhythm is good; and the 'musicians' who are interested in hearing and learning new tunes and particularly in how they are 'arranged'.

Nowhere is this new attitude more in evidence than at meetings of the accordion and fiddle club in Lerwick, when one contrasts its meetings with the average village concert. The regular evening meetings of the Lerwick club follow the pattern of similar clubs in Scotland: a visiting guest artist, duo or ensemble contributes two major 'spots' in the evening and local club members fill up the rest of the programme. Compared with the traditional and positively conservative interests of the Shetland Fiddlers' Society, the club is musically progressive, though a number of musicians are members of both organisations. The club provides a platform for young instrumentalists who otherwise might not be heard outside their own



homes. At these meetings the playing of better fiddlers and accordionists is carefully studied by an informed and critical, if outwardly kindly, audience. The playing of bands too receives a critical audience from other musicians interested in the 'arrangements' produced by the bands (i.e. their choices of harmony). Such studied attention makes some performers nervous - "it's no a nice feeling at all". Yet the acclaim of musicians is important to the musicians themselves, be they fiddlers or accordionists. Gordon Jamieson put it thus:-

"Now when we go to a concert, a normal concert like a regatta concert, it's a night's out. They're going there for entertainment and accepting everything that comes. So you play something like Cock O the North, for instance, and they're quite prepared to accept that as a tune - you've played a tune and that's O.K. You've done your turn. But when we go to the accordion clubs [we go] with a completely different frame of mind because the people who go to accordion clubs are people who know there will be nothing but accordion playing or fiddle playing, it's going to be music .... solely music... and there's nothing that gives a greater thrill as there's somebody you appreciate as being a good musician coming up at the end and saying 'I liked what you did'.

(SA/1981/13)

In addition to the rise of the 'club' another strong influence on dance band musicians has been the radio broadcasts of Scottish dance music. Most fiddlers and accordionists make a point of listening to the regular Saturday evening programme 'Take the Floor', which features among other things, the music of individual bands and instrumentalists and includes also discussions with musicians about their music. The reactions of Shetlanders vary towards what they hear in such programmes. Some traditionally-minded fiddlers will praise certain Scottish bands, which accordionists and others might consider outdated particularly because of their rudimentary harmonic 'arrangements'. The same fiddlers are likely to find the syncopating rhythmic devices (of second accordionists and drummers) in the more innovative bands too 'jazzy' for their tastes. Clearly there is no



longer a single homogeneous musical culture in Shetland.

It is tempting to draw a parallel between what is happening in Shetland today with what occurred in Edinburgh and other Scottish towns in the late 18th century, a period which saw the introduction of harmonic concepts along with the composing, arranging and publication of a vast amount of new music. Almost all publications provided bass lines for the tunes so that they could be played by the typical assembly hall ensemble of fiddle, keyboard and cello. But there is an important difference. In the 18th century the only ways of disseminating new styles, new repertories and novel ideas of harmony were, apart from through live performances, through the medium of printed books and fiddlers' tune books. Outside the few large towns and cities and the country homes of the wealthy, such developments passed unheeded by the vast majority of traditional fiddlers. They belonged to an essentially oral tradition where a basic monophonic tradition was at most complemented by drone or static variable-drone harmony.

Now it is true that a number of dance music collections have also been published in Shetland in recent years. In addition to Tom Anderson's teaching collection, Haand me Doon da Fiddle (Anderson and Swing, op.cit.) and the Shetland Folk Society's book, Da Mirrie Dancers, a handful of other composers have seen their works in print. Ronald Cooper has produced 5 books under the title Shetland Music, Ian Burns' collection Spootiskerry appeared in 1980 and some of Frank Jamieson's pieces have appeared in Dance Music from Shetland and the North East (1975). They are listed in the bibliography.

Furthermore, as in 18th century mainland Scotland, the

tradition in Shetland is also still principally oral (though now the teaching of traditional fiddling in schools includes the teaching of notation). The important difference is that the personal cassette recorder and the availability of discs and broadcast music (frequently recorded on to cassette at home for further listening) greatly facilitates the rapid spread of new styles and tunes. Ian Burns and Tom Anderson, both mindful of the importance of the oral tradition, produced cassettes to accompany their books. Significantly also, several composers are not sufficiently musically literate to write out their own works but record their tunes on to cassettes and send them to friends who transcribe the tunes for them. This is done not so much because the composers think that their tunes will reach a wider audience by having them printed, but because their copyright is safeguarded - a consideration that had no relevance at all in earlier times but is important now that so many new tunes are appearing on cassette and disc.

In chapter 2 it was shown that the repertory was expanding considerably, though Scottish style strathspeys, pipe-marches and slow airs are still not as popular as reels, jigs, hornpipes and march-time tunes for the Boston Two-Step (now regarded by some as 'Shetland's national dance'). By way of example, Ian Burns' Spootiskerry contains 9 reels, 10 jigs, 5 marches, 3 waltzes, 1 hornpipe and 2 Schottisches. Of the slow airs Frank Jamieson's Margaret Ann Robertson has enjoyed wide popularity since it was published as the sole slow air among the modern Shetland pieces included in Da Mirrie Dancers (the Shetland Folk Society's collection) and William Hunter junr.'s Leaving Lerwick Harbour is also well known to all Shetlanders, having reached a wide audience through its inclusion in the disc Scottish Tradition 4: Shetland Fiddle Music. But Frank Jamieson remarked:

"My father would never have thought of composing a slow air, they wouldn't understand a slow air - well they'd mebbe understand it but it wasn't a trend at that time at all, it was all reels and jigs."

(SA/1980/13)

This is an indication of contrasting rates of change between different communities. Few slow airs have been composed outside Lerwick, where most innovation naturally occurs. Dr. Tom Anderson has probably composed more slow airs than any other Shetlander. Many other fiddlers may play slow airs however, but choose them from the repertory of Scottish airs, those of James Scott Skinner being particularly popular. William Hunters' slow air was composed as a deliberate exercise in writing in the Scottish style and was evidently considered successful, for it won second prize in the composition section of the Banchory Strathspey and Reel Society's annual competitive festival in 1973.

However, one might predict that as years go by differences between the various communities in musical taste and rate of <sup>change</sup> will tend to disappear since transmission of new repertories and styles depend very little on movements of people from one community to another (which is in any case now greatly facilitated) but rather on the use of radio and cassette and disc recordings.

To sum up then, we have seen how the role of the fiddler has changed radically during during the last twenty or more years, how musical tastes have changed also and consequently how this has affected performing style. Another important change that cannot be ignored is that Shetland is no longer a 'one-instrument' society, nor a homogeneous musical sub-culture. Guitars, accordions, and electronic keyboards have been added to the inventory of musical instruments, and as many young persons are learning these instruments

as attempt to play the fiddle. The presence too of the whole paraphernalia of 'Orff' instruments in the music classrooms of the islands' schools and availability of training in orchestral instruments must also contribute to widening musical tastes.

Several different musical sub-cultures now flourish in Shetland. In Lerwick the dance music tradition continues with unabated vigour as well as its associated listening tradition (encouraged by such organisations as the Lerwick Accordion and Fiddle Club) but there is also a Country and Western Club which meets regularly in Lerwick, concerts by visiting chamber orchestras and recitalists are well attended and, of course, the younger members of Lerwick society hold their own discos where the latest popular music can be heard.

Lastly the incorporating of fiddle teaching into the education system must inevitably produce further change. Regional stylistic differences belong today to the older fiddlers. The young students tend to learn the style of their teachers. But while some Shetlanders regard the loss of regional style with some sorrow - for it was another indicator for them of 'good old days', others are less worried, for they see the compensatory boost which, they hope, institutionalised teaching will give to the tradition as a whole.

But this change in the mode of learning could have more radical unwanted effects. Several fiddlers commented that their way of learning was to take their father's (or someone-else's) fiddle while the owner was occupied, go off to a quiet place and practise away 'where I wouldn't annoy anybody'. Their comments seem true for the tradition throughout the islands and Andrew Poleson's account of

how he learned is fairly typical (see chapter 2). He already knew the repertory from hearing it sung and played so often, and he had watched many other fiddlers playing in his own parlour and in the homes of friends for night after night from early childhood. It only remained for him to learn to manipulate the instrument himself. He took his own time about it, had no-one else learning alongside him who might be making faster progress and so make him discouraged, nor anyone around to criticise him and similarly put him off. Furthermore he was not required to pass any prognostic test of musical ability (pace Bentley, Wing and others) before he began trying to play. If his parents had learned of this interest they would probably have encouraged him and might even have obtained a small sized fiddle for him to play - but would do little more than that, other than showing pleasure at his first attempts at making music on the instrument.

But the cultural environment was so encouraging to any would-be fiddler. The fiddle was not regarded as a specially difficult instrument to learn and so many others around him played the fiddle and all were regarded with favour for the contribution they could make to the cultural and social life of the community. Furthermore, the learner did not complicate matters by struggling to read notation while in the early stages of learning his instrument for the tradition was essentially oral, in any case since he already knew the tunes he was attempting to play he had no need of notation and merely needed to learn the geography of his instrument and train his fingers. Lastly any kind of grading of progress was unknown<sup>n</sup> in the traditional setting and competitions were unheard of. Certainly audiences made informal comparisons, but the main interest of the listeners lay in enjoying how the player's individuality, his character shone through in his own versions of well known tunes - for

he is almost as much composer as player.

If the institutionalised teaching of the fiddle in Shetland could operate with due regard for the advantages inherent in the traditional way of learning then little but good could come from the experiment. Unfortunately evidence in 1982 suggested that this might not be the case. For example, four years earlier some twenty children attending Cullivoe Primary School were taken on by the visiting teacher. In February 1982 only one child was still receiving lessons - and this in a community where an earlier survey showed that approximately one third of the men and youths of the village could 'take a tune out of the fiddle'. Facts like these should warn the authorities that the project may not be working out as it should.

Another event the same year was the holding of the first competition in traditional fiddling. It was sponsored by the Shetland Folk Society which awarded the prize of a locally made violin to the winner. The competition generated some controversy. For one thing some of <sup>the</sup> tests included playing Scottish pieces and some Shetlanders argued that this was inappropriate to a competition in traditional Shetland fiddling. But others opposed the whole notion of turning fiddling into a competitive activity - for them the fiddle had traditionally expressed the togetherness of communities and they felt it was wrong to encourage an activity which singled out (literally) a winner. It smacked too much of the whole character of the classical tradition, with its competitions, professional soloists and cadres of critics. Furthermore, many Shetlanders had remarked that for them one of the great joys in hearing the fiddle played was to note how the personality of the player was built into not only his performance but his version of the piece. They endorse Sonny Bruce's advice to his

son "Do'nt copy anybody.....", and would not like to see such individual creativity being endangered by the unconscious (or even conscious) pressures of a performer /judge situation). In any case, as Vaughan Williams has already pointed out, the wider the base of the pyramid of practical music-making the higher will be the apex - excellence will come without the need for artificial support (Vaughan Williams, National Music, p.239).

But to analyse the problems and possibilities of the whole process of institutionalisation of traditional fiddling in Shetland needs a paper in itself. At this stage in this thesis one can only point out that here is a problem which needs further study, and that an ethnomusicological approach can help provide the necessary background for a truer understanding of the problems and possibilities for the future.